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John Sergeant. (Photograph by Barney Sharratt.)

JOHN SERGEANT AND HIS CIRCLE

A Study of Three Seventeenth-Century English Aristotelians

BY

DOROTHEA KROOK

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

BEVERLEY C. SOUTHGATE



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In memory of Michael Oakeshott

of whose transcendent excellencies

“let any Atheist, or discreet Moor, or Pagan be judge.”

(Thomas White, *An Apology for Rushworth's Dialogues*, 1654, p. 109)

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Dorothea Krook's work should do much to restore John Sergeant and his circle (including most importantly Thomas White and Kenelm Digby) to the map of seventeenth-century philosophy, from which they have been for far too long excluded. Over sixty years ago, one scholar noted that "perhaps there are few names in the history of philosophy as little known as that of John Sergeant"¹, and little has been done in the meantime to remedy that situation. Indeed, as recently as 1988, one distinguished historian effectively dismissed both Sergeant himself and White as being members of an unremembered group of "Catholic controversialists, whose only historical distinction is their entanglement with [Chillingworth]".²

Such assessments tell us more about prevailing fashions in historiography, than about actual historical importance, and they provoke questions about the very purpose of historical enquiry. Despite conventional repudiation of a "Whiggish" approach, whereby the past is construed in terms of our present, historians of philosophy have largely continued to trace the development of their subject in terms of a comparatively few "major" figures: a glance at most histories of philosophy will confirm the existence of a recognised canon of "great" philosophers, whose thought leads ultimately and unsurprisingly to our own good selves. There may, from a philosophical standpoint, be some justification in accepting the traditional selection: it may be that those conventionally accounted "great" have peculiar claims on our attention by virtue of their own philosophical quality—their clarity or originality or subtlety or comprehensiveness in treating issues of continuing philosophical concern. But if our aim is to understand, as best we can, the past, then that past—and even that philosophical or intellectual past—must surely include the equivalent not only of kings and queens and leaders, but also of those more ordinary mortals who constitute the majority of people.

As soon as one thus extends the net of historical enquiry, many long-ignored figures are caught up for re-evaluation; and of these,

¹ N. C. Bradish, "John Sergeant: a forgotten critic of Descartes and Locke", *Monist* xxxix (1929), 571–628; republished by Open Court Publishing Co. (Peru, Illinois, 1929).

² H. Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans* (Chicago, 1988), p. 205.

many, under a newly-focused attention, take on a new significance. John Sergeant and his circle constitute a case in point. Sergeant himself is acknowledged by Dorothea Krook to be only "a superior journeyman" rather than "a master philosopher", and the same might be claimed of other members of his "circle"; but their re-appraisal does highlight the significance of such thinkers for our understanding of the intellectually-ambivalent time in which they lived. In this context, their contributions to the long-lived Aristotelian tradition in philosophy is of particular interest, and Professor Krook's work contributes importantly to this area of current concern in the history of ideas.

Aristotelianism has, over the last decade, been the object of renewed study. The work of the late Charles Schmitt and others has established that, far from being a static structure of thought that was definitively replaced by the new philosophy of the "scientific revolution", Aristotelianism underwent continuing modification, both before and throughout the seventeenth century.³ Its resilience and adaptability in face of the new thought, and its consequent longevity, is beautifully illustrated in the writings of Digby, White and Sergeant: their philosophical syntheses, incorporating new ideas within an essentially scholastic framework, testify to that framework's amazing flexibility, and defy the confrontational model of mutually-exclusive opposites propounded even at the time by such would-be revolutionaries as Francis Bacon. It is the continuing existence and continuing importance of a modified form of Aristotelianism right into the late seventeenth century, that is emphasised here by Dorothea Krook.

For that late survival of scholasticism, much responsibility must be attributed to John Sergeant himself, and to his "circle" of Blackloist collaborators, with whom he was closely associated from the 1650s. The so-called "Blackloists" were a group or "faction" of English Catholics, who derived their name from the best-known alias, "Blacklo", of Thomas White—himself a man whose historical rehabilitation has been long overdue.⁴ Membership of what was perceived by some Catholics as a detested "cabal", is conven-

³ See e.g. C. B. Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (London, 1983); John Case and *Aristotelianism in Renaissance England* (Kingston and Montreal, 1983); E. Grant, "Ways to interpret the terms 'Aristotelian' and 'Aristotelianism' in Medieval and Renaissance Natural Philosophy", *History of Science* xxv (1987), 335–358.

⁴ For a first-attempt at such rehabilitation, see B. C. Southgate, "Covetous of Truth": *The Life and Work of Thomas White, 1593–1676* (Dordrecht, 1993).

iently recorded by the hostile Robert Pugh, who lists in addition to their leader White himself, Henry Holden, Peter Fitton (who later recovered his orthodoxy), Kenelm Digby, and of course the disreputable John Sergeant ("of evil reputation", as he is described).⁵ Others identified elsewhere as Blackloists include Mark Harrington, Hugh Cressy, and John Belson;⁶ and together these "Papists of the new Modell" constituted what came to be perceived by more orthodox fellow-Catholics as "the most formidable faction, which has ever yet endangered our small national church."⁷

The philosophy espoused by the Blackloists was essentially that of their eponymous leader, and embraced aspects theological, scientific, and political. In brief, their aim was to achieve toleration for Catholic worship. In pursuit of that goal, they proposed such modifications to theology as would make it more acceptable to the Protestant authorities—for example, questioning the concept of purgatory and the validity of related "Indulgences", denying the infallibility of the Pope, and transferring from Rome to Parliament the power of appointing English bishops. The Blackloists recognised that their proposals would never be accepted by all their co-religionists, and least of all by the Jesuits; but that was a price they were well-prepared to pay. So too was continuing loyalty to the deposed monarch: by 1655, White's pragmatic political advice to English Catholics was to accept the *de facto* régime of the Cromwellian Protectorate.⁸

For obvious reasons, therefore, Blackloist political aspirations never recovered from the blow delivered by the restoration of the monarchy. In 1660, White himself proved a convenient scapegoat: by Protestants, he could be identified as a typical Catholic anti-royalist; by fellow-Catholics he had to be repudiated for political as well as theological unorthodoxy; and in real danger of his life he fled to Holland.⁹

But despite the demise of any practical political aspirations, the philosophical and theological positions associated with Blackloism

⁵ Robert Pugh, *Blacklo's Cabal discovered in Severall of their Letters* (1680; facsimile reprint ed. T. A. Birrell, Farnborough, 1970), Epistle to the Catholick Reader.

⁶ Charles Plowden, *Remarks on a Book entitled Memoirs of Gregorio Panzani* (Liège, 1794), p. 363; John Tillotson, *The Rule of Faith* (London, 1666), p. 119.

⁷ Matthew Poole, *Nullity of the Romish Faith*, p. 39; Plowden, *Remarks*, p. 200.

⁸ Thomas White, *The Grounds of Obedience and Government* (London, 1655).

⁹ See B. C. Southgate, "That Damned Booke': *The Grounds of Obedience and Government* (1655), and the downfall of Thomas White", *Recusant History* xvii (1985), 238–253.

long persisted. Expounded by White and Digby in the 1640s and '50s, these were essentially concerned with countering the challenge of Pyrrhonian scepticism. In face of what seemed a growing threat to the possibility of any certain knowledge, the Blackloists sought to present a coherent intellectual package which would guarantee that certainty on which they believed human salvation ultimately depended. So they formulated a remarkable intellectual synthesis, combining elements of new thought with old, and (in twentieth century terminology) of science with religion.

The philosophical syntheses associated with the Blackloists are best exemplified by White's *De Mundo*, 1642, and *Peripateticall Institutions*, 1646, and by Digby's *Two Treatises*, 1644. These demonstrate the remarkable ability of men, still professing to be essentially "Aristotelians", to incorporate into their theories many important aspects of the "new philosophy"—including, not least, modified forms of "mechanistic" physics and of Copernican cosmology. The syntheses formulated by White and Digby derive from their ability to engraft upon the scholastic framework in which they had been conventionally educated, those newly-fashionable ideas with which they became familiar in their European travels in the middle decades of the century; and it is this intellectual mélange that Sergeant later adopts as the basis of his own philosophy.

That philosophy, further, includes components often characterised as theological. When accused by a critic of failing to subscribe to conventional disciplinary distinctions, White readily pleads guilty to propounding a "new Philosophical Theology, . . . a new Demonstrative Religion"—or in other words, a properly integrated package in which the strands of religion and science were not distinct. His whole career, he explains, has been devoted to demonstrating the compatibility of religion and reason, so that he is more than happy to concede that his theology and science are "so perfectly squar'd, that if I had not made a Division of the Books it had been impossible to know where one ended and the other began."¹⁰ And in this respect, too, John Sergeant subsequently retains what proved to be an increasingly unfashionable Blackloist stance.

That Sergeant did consistently represent Blackloism was widely recognised. His appointment as Secretary of the English Catholic Chapter in 1655 served to illustrate the political dominance of

¹⁰ Thomas White, *Religion and Reason* (Paris, 1660), pp. 11, 25. White is here responding to S.W., *A Vindication . . .* (Paris, 1659).

White's followers at that time: the hostile John Warner alleges that Sergeant had "put himself entirely into the hands of White (alias Blacklow) to be trained and taught by him"; and, according to a later account, he was "usually called Blacklow's Philip, in allusion to the secondary part which Philip Melancthon acted under Luther."¹¹ In the "rule of faith" debates during the 1650s and '60s, Sergeant's Catholic contributions were recognised by his Protestant opponents as owing much to the influence of White as his "acknowledged Master",¹² and shortly before his enforced resignation from his official position in 1667, he was still being described as White's "professed disciple".¹³ Indeed, the Blackloist connection was identified even at his death in 1707: "J.S[ergeant] is dead", records Sylvester Jenks. "But I had rather write his faction [i.e. Blackloism] had been dead."¹⁴

It is in the context of John Sergeant's continuing identification with the Blackloist philosophy of White and Digby, that an historiographical caveat has to be inserted. For it seems, in the light of recent scholarship, that that philosophy was less purely Aristotelian than Dorothea Krook suggests. Research during the years since her death has increasingly questioned the somewhat rigid systems of classification with which we have previously worked: terms such as "Ancient" and "Modern", for example, have been shown to denote far from mutually-exclusive categories,¹⁵ and it seems unlikely that Professor Krook would now wish to claim Sergeant as an "Aristotelian" *tout court*.¹⁶ This is, of course,

¹¹ T. A. Birrell ed., *Warner's History of the English Persecution of Catholics and the Presbyterian Plot*, Catholic Record Society, vols. 47, 48 (London, 1953), p. 230; Plowden, *Remarks*, p. 285.

¹² See e.g. John Tillotson, *Rule of Faith*, pp. 18, 201, 250, 305, 316; Edward Stillingfleet, *A Reply to Mr J. S[ergeant]* (London, 1666), pp. 2, 52; Henry Hammond, *The Dispatcher dispatch'd* (London, 1659), pp. 55, 121, 202; Jeremy Taylor, *Dissuasive from Popery*, Part 2 (London, 1668), p. 64.

¹³ The Lord Bishop of Portalegre [i.e. Richard Russell], letter to Abbot Montagu, dated by Pugh to 14 October 1667, in *Blacklo's Cabal*, p. 124. Cf. M. Sharratt ed., *Lisbon College Register, 1628-1813* (Catholic Record Society, vol. 72, 1991), p. 175. On Russell's relationship with Sergeant, see further Michael Sharratt, "Bishop Russell and John Sergeant", *Ushaw Magazine* 253, 1979, 22-37.

¹⁴ BL Addit. MS 29612, f. 60.

¹⁵ See e.g. T. Sorell ed., *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz* (Oxford, 1993).

¹⁶ Cf. the contemporary assessment of Bishop Richard Russell: "John was not content to travel the well-worn path of Aristotelian philosophy, with its many occult qualities and its way of disputing problematically about everything. He sought anxiously for certainty, and applied himself assiduously to the new philosophers of our time, namely Descartes, Digby and I know not who else." *Lisbon College Register*, p. 174.

far from saying that her own emphasis on Sergeant's Aristotelianism is in any way invalidated, but rather that that Aristotelianism is to be seen as one vitally important strand of a multi-faceted synthesis.¹⁷

Indeed, there is no doubt that Dorothea Krook's work constitutes an extremely valuable study in its own right, and—just as the author herself would undoubtedly have wanted—that it will serve to provoke further research. Her own interest in Sergeant and his circle dates back for over thirty years.¹⁸ At her death in 1989 she left a draft article on "John Sergeant and the Jesuits", originally written in 1954, with indications that she intended some revisions; and despite its incomplete state we have decided to include this here as an appendix. She also left a much-revised manuscript of this book, which was almost ready for publication; and my own editorial function has been small. On first reading the manuscript, I was struck by the personal *enthusiasm* for her subject that positively emanated from her writing, and she herself (page 10 *infra*) describes her aim "to communicate and share the ever fresh *pleasure* I have had from contemplating the idiosyncracies of his [i.e. Sergeant's] intellectual temper". She has written elsewhere of her own belief in the importance of literary *style* in philosophical writing—urging "the claims of style in its widest sense as an important source of illumination to us in our effort to understand the doctrine itself"; and in this respect she suggests that even apparently insignificant parentheses can prove revealing.¹⁹ It is with these beliefs that Professor Krook has included many quite long (and largely un-"modernised") quotations from her sources—"to let their voices be heard at regular intervals, saying in their own idioms what I claim they are saying".²⁰

In face of such views, it seemed to me that Dorothea Krook's own text should be left more or less untouched, and I have made only a few adjustments, of which I am confident she would herself

¹⁷ See further B. C. Southgate, "'Beating Down Scepticism': the solid philosophy of John Sergeant, 1623–1707", in M. A. Stewart ed., *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford, forthcoming).

¹⁸ In the meantime, Dorothea Krook published the work on Henry James for which she is best known: see esp. *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge, 1962).

¹⁹ Dorothea Krook, *Three Traditions of Moral Thought* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 9–10, 110; cf. pp. 17–18.

²⁰ These words are taken from a draft "Note on Quotations" left by the author.

have approved: a few loose ends have been tidied,²¹ references standardised, occasional footnotes in square brackets added, and a bibliography of cited works compiled. Finally, this introduction has been included, in hopes that the book will prove of interest, not only to philosophers but also to all historians of seventeenth-century ideas.

²¹ In particular the conclusion has been modified. Professor Krook had planned further chapters, on "Sergeant's Women" and on some "Problems Unsolv'd", but I have been unable to find enough material in her notes to reconstruct her ideas on these.

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I am grateful to the University of Hertfordshire for granting sabbatical leave which has enabled me to complete this work, and to the British Academy for a small personal research-grant, which made it possible for me in particular to consult the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, where Dorothea Krook's notes and papers (including her latest amendments to this text, and her article on "John Sergeant and the Jesuits") have been deposited.

My work has been made pleasurable by helpful librarians and archivists, including especially Dr Michael Sharratt of Ushaw College, Durham; The Reverend F. J. Turner of Stonyhurst College; Yoram Mayorek and Naomi Niv of the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem. Meeting some of Dorothea Krook's friends, relations, and former colleagues has been another unexpected bonus; and in particular I should like to thank her sister and literary executor, Anita Jackson, for her encouragement and practical assistance.

Beverley Southgate
The University of Hertfordshire
December, 1992

PREFACE

"How does one *find* a John Sergeant?" people used to ask me in real or pretended envy at the time I first came upon the subject of this book. When I told them the story of how it happened, they seemed to enjoy it; so I venture to recount it here, feeling it has a certain piquancy, and something of the drama and excitement occasionally to be extracted from the business of scholarship. I fancy it also brings out some typical features of the process of discovery in research: how one question leads to another; how what you know directs you to what you don't know, enabling you to recognise the interest of the unknown you have stumbled upon; how the mysterious, the baffling, the intractable in the new stuff is the inspiration to pursuing it and wrestling with it until it yields up some sort of coherent meaning.

I was winding up my reading for a doctoral dissertation on doctrines of language, meaning, and truth in seventeenth-century English thought, which I had called, somewhat ambiguously, "Language-consciousness in the Seventeenth Century in England". Its centrepiece was Hobbes, whose radically nominalistic doctrine of meaning and truth as exclusively properties of language (hence "language-consciousness") was summed up in the Hobbesian dictum "Truth, and a true proposition, is all one", which had become the *leitmotif* of my enquiry. My search for doctrines of meaning and truth approximating to or diverging from Hobbes's had led me to study some of the main figures associated with the newly established Royal Society, starting with its spiritual founding father, Francis Bacon, ending with Locke, and taking in such important secondary thinkers as Thomas Sprat, Joseph Glanvill, Robert Boyle, Samuel Parker, Roger Cotes, and others.

I had turned up again the entry on Glanvill in Anthony à Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* in order to check some point, I forget what; and having checked it, I found myself idly reading on, drawn I suppose by Wood's inimitable chattiness. I noted again, as I read, his useful habit of listing the main "animadversions" directed against his author, and his easy leisurely way of pausing to interpolate something about the life and works of the authors of the animadversions, along with other digressive matter. My eye came to rest on one of these interpolations which I didn't remember noticing in my previous reading or readings of the Glanvill entry. Among the attacks on Glanvill's *The Vanity of*

Dogmatizing, said Wood, was a work bearing the peremptory title *An Exclusion of Scepticks from all Title to Dispute*, whose author was one Thomas White, also known as Thomas Blackloe, or Blacklow, and by other aliases. I had never heard of him, and learnt from the note that followed that he had been a Roman Catholic priest, famous in his day as a formidable controversialist in the Roman cause; that he had died in 1676 at the age of eighty-three; that he had published many books, which “made a great noise in the world”; that “by his death the Roman Catholics lost an eminent ornament from among them”. But what leapt out at me was this passage in Wood’s paragraph about Thomas White:

Hobbes of Malmesbury had a great respect for him, and when he [Hobbes] lived in Westminster, he would often visit him and he Hobbes, but seldom parted in cool blood: for they would wrangle, squabble, and scold about philosophical matters like young Sophistors though either of them was eighty years of age . . . Those Scholars, who were sometimes present at their wrangling disputes, held that the Laurel was carried away by White.¹

Doubtless because Hobbes was constantly in the forefront of my consciousness and all roads seemed to lead to or from Hobbes, the question rose to my mind, What on earth could these two—Thomas Hobbes, the most renowned atheist of the age, and this Thomas White, a Catholic priest and defender of the Roman faith—what could they find to wrangle, squabble, and scold *about*? What conceivable common ground could there be between them to make the wrangling, squabbling, and scolding possible? There had to be some common ground, else there couldn’t be any wrangling, squabbling, etc. But what could it be? What *could* it be?

The question was tantalising enough to make me decide on the spot that I must just quickly look up Thomas White *alias* Blacklo² in the catalogue (this was in the Cambridge University Library), to see whether he was there, and if he was, what preliminary light, if any, could be gleaned from the list of his works about the Hobbes connection. He was there all right: the number of works listed, about half in Latin, half in English, was quite substantial; and among them, in the bibliography section, was a work entitled *Blakloanae Haeresis, olim in Pelagio et Manichaeis damnatae nunc denuo renascentis, Historia et Confutatio*, written by

¹ Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ed. P. Bliss (4 vols.; London, 1813–20), iii.1247.

² [“Blacklo”, variously spelt, is White’s most commonly used alias: others include “Anglus”, “Candidus”, “Albius”, “Bianchi”, and “Vitius”.]

one “*Lominus*,”³ published in Gandavi (Ghent) in 1675.

The *Blakloanae Haeresis* proved to be the turning-point in my process of discovery. If Thomas White was a heretic, I said to myself, or even just charged with heresy—well, yes, *that* might draw him closer to Hobbes and perhaps make sense of their wranglings and squabblings. Depending, of course, on the heresy; and I vaguely imagined something dramatic—some spectacular form of the Pelagianism and Manichaeism mentioned in the title. The heresy, alas, turned out to be disappointing. It appeared to be some deviation from the received doctrine of purgatory (“the middle state of souls”), esoteric and not very interesting; along with indications of other offensive matter whose import was not easy to grasp. Having struggled through the longish Preface, I felt I had wasted enough time on this unrewarding “*Historia et Confutatio*” and was about to put the book back on the shelf. But force of habit held me back; perhaps I would just turn the pages to the end, in case, just in case, something more interesting turned up.

Something did, very soon: the unknown John Sergeant, White’s accomplice in “*haeresum Blackloi & Sargentii*”. Page after page, in double columns, of extracts from his works; in beautiful clear English; saying things that made my breath stop with excitement. It was all about the Catholic “rule of faith” and how it may be proved to be infallibly true; but what rivetted me was the logical-linguistic emphasis of the methods of proof. Truth, the author kept on saying, was an attribute of propositions; the truth of propositions was always a matter of “the necessary connexion of terms” (meaning, it seemed, the connexion of subject and predicate); and the *most* necessary connexion of terms was to be found in identical propositions—for instance, “A rule of faith is a rule of faith”. Identical propositions, he insisted, were the paradigms of apodeictically true propositions, and all true or demonstrative knowledge (“science”) was ultimately based on them.

There was a great deal more on these lines, all sounding very strange and more than a little mad: in what possible sense could tautologies like “a rule of faith is a rule of faith” be the foundation of true knowledge? But I drank in statements that might have come straight out of Hobbes, lacking only the aphoristic finish of that master of style. “Truth, and a true proposition, is all one”, Hobbes had said; and here was this Sergeant saying, for example: “To see the truth of such propositions, *or which is all*

³ [I.e. Peter Talbot, Archbishop of Dublin.]

one, the immediate connexion of their terms, is to see they cannot but be so, or that they are absolutely void of all possibility of falsehood".⁴ And he was saying it not once, but over and over again in similar or different words.

It was too interesting, too puzzling, too provoking to let go. I didn't have the time, I had more than enough material for my dissertation, I had the final deadline for its delivery pressing close. But I felt I *must* pursue this further, just a little further. The upshot was that I abandoned everything else, ignored the looming deadline (I had already passed several previous ones), and spent the next eight months, day and night, reading all the works of John Sergeant I could lay hold of, in the Cambridge University Library, in the Library of St. John's College, Cambridge, and in the British Library. Sergeant and his principal associates, Thomas White and Kenelm Digby, became two bulky chapters in an already over-sized doctoral dissertation; and a further three years' work on them resulted in the first draft of a book, of which this study is a revised and expanded version.

In my more recent work for this book, I was glad to find my opinion of Sergeant's interest for the student of seventeenth-century English thought confirmed by at least one great scholar: Lord Acton, who in a long letter to Mary Gladstone about the novel *John Inglesant* speaks of Sergeant and White as two of the "original thinkers" among the English Catholics of the period.⁵ Nevertheless, despite Acton, no one to my knowledge has yet attempted a reasonably comprehensive and systematic exposition of Sergeant's thought; and this has further encouraged me to write this introductory book.

John Sergeant's thought may still be a blank for most seventeenth-century scholars; but there is another side of his life and activities that has received more attention in recent years, mainly from historians of English Catholicism in the seventeenth century. The object of this attention is Sergeant's life-long antipathy to the Jesuits, springing, according to Sergeant's account of the matter, from two settled convictions: that the zealotry of the English Jesuits was a deadly danger to the whole English Catholic community, already suffering ferocious persecution from a Protestant government intent on extirpating the Catholic faith; and that the Jesuit zealots wished to dominate the secular clergy,

⁴ Quoted in *Blakloanae Haeresis*, p. 259.

⁵ Lord Acton, *Letters to Mary, Daughter of the Rt. Hon. W.E. Gladstone* ed. H. Paul (London, 1904), p.140.

imposing on them principles and practices they detested, and endeavouring to supplant them in their traditional leadership of the Catholic laity. These convictions, possibly reinforced by other motives, led Sergeant during the period of the Oates Plot ("Popish Plot") to offer his services to Charles II's government as an informer against the Jesuits, with a view to assisting in their permanent expulsion from England.

The episode is obviously discreditable to Sergeant, and has been justly reprobated by the historians, starting with the late Malcolm V. Hay, who uncovered the story and recorded it, with the relevant documentation in his book *The Jesuits and the Popish Plot*, published in 1934. I had intended to review this whole passage in Sergeant's life with its multifold ramifications in a concluding section of this book. But I found the subject was too complex and controversial to be handled in a relatively brief space, as a mere appendix to the account of Sergeant's thought which is the main task of this book. Accordingly, I decided to reserve this more explosive material for a separate short study, to be called *John Sergeant and the Jesuits*.⁶

I wish to acknowledge very gratefully the help I received in my search for Sergeant texts and biographical material from the late F. P. White, some-time Librarian of St. John's College, Cambridge; from its present Sub-librarian, Mr. M. Pratt, who was immensely kind and generous about supplying me with photocopies of rare Sergeant material in the St. John's Library; and to the Senior Associates, Librarian, and Curator of Rare Books at the Huntington Library, San Marino, where I found some extremely rare works of Sergeant and others. The Librarians of the Rare Books collections in the Cambridge University Library, the British Library, and the Houghton Library at Harvard were also invariably kind and helpful about meeting my needs.

One of the penalties of leaving this book unwritten for so long is that some of the people who were most helpful to me in its early stages are no longer alive. So my grateful acknowledgments to them have to be posthumous: to the late Canon J. Sullivan, of the English College at Lisbon, for sending me some valuable Sergeant material, as well as the photograph of the portrait of Sergeant reproduced as the frontispiece of this book with the

⁶ [This work was never completed, but a draft article by Dorothea Krook is now included as an appendix. It is clear that Professor Krook intended to make further amendments, but it seems preferable to publish the article as it stands, rather than have her work entirely wasted.]

kind permission of the President of the College;⁷ to the late Dr. J. H. King, Bishop of Portsmouth, for allowing me to see some Sergeant letters in his possession and generally taking a lively interest in my work; and to the late Professor J. H. Randall, of Columbia University, who read the original version of this book and made many excellent criticisms and suggestions that I used extensively in expanding and revising it.

Old friends and colleagues, still vigorously alive, whom I want to thank for help and encouragement in the first period of my work on Sergeant are Peter Stern, Erich Heller, Robert Sprigge, Olga MacDonald (Mrs. H. Meidner), and Zoe Geffen (Mrs. H. K. Girling); and particularly Peter Laslett, who was working on Locke at the time and took a warm interest in my research on Sergeant. For more recent help, I wish to thank Fr. Thomas H. Clancy, S.J., of Loyola University, New Orleans, who was most encouraging about the early draft of this book and afterwards supplied me with his bibliography of Catholic Books 1652–1700 before it was published.

D. K., 1988
Kibbutz Ein-Harod (Meuchad)
Israel

⁷ [The archives from the English College at Lisbon are now held at Ushaw College, Durham; and I am grateful to the librarian, Dr Michael Sharratt, for enabling me to consult these. The new photograph used for the frontispiece was taken by Mr Barney Sharratt, and is reproduced with his kind permission. How good a likeness is provided by the portrait is not clear. In Professor Krook's papers I found the following quotation from Sylvester Jenks' "Letter Book" (BL Add. MS 29612, f. 139): "If it be not a better Picture, and more like J. S. than that which was sent to Lisbon, I have lost my labour."]

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: CAREER AND CONNECTIONS

The known facts of John Sergeant's life and career are relatively sparse and can be quickly told.¹ He was born in 1622 or 1623 at Barrow-upon-Humber in Lincolnshire, the son of a yeoman of the town. Nothing appears to be known about his life before his admission to St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1639. He took his degree in 1642–43; and immediately afterwards was sent to take up the post of secretary to Thomas Morton, Bishop of Durham, "upon the recommendation of Dr William Beal, head of the house [St John's], and the joint approbation of the seniors." This suggests that he was considered an able young man with a promising career before him; so the Master and Fellows of St. John's must have been disappointed when, after less than a year with Bishop Morton, he abandoned the Anglican communion and was received into the Church of Rome. Sergeant briefly mentions the reason for this momentous step in his autobiographical *Literary Life*.² He had been led to it, he says, by his "searching into the records of antiquity" (meaning, his study of the early Fathers), which had opened his eyes to the distortions, misrepresentations, and falsifications of the Fathers by the Protestant divines. This is all he says about it in the *Literary Life*, written towards the end of his life; he doubtless thought it unnecessary by this time to say more in view of the ample evidence contained in his polemical writings of the scorn in which he held the foundations of Protestant theology.

Immediately after his conversion in 1643, Sergeant left England for the English College at Lisbon, where he remained for twelve years, was ordained, and became Prefect of Studies. He finally returned to England in 1655, after a brief visit in 1653; and from that year until his death in 1707, at well over eighty, he steadfastly pursued his career as a philosopher, theologian,

¹ [For some further biographical material, see G. Anstruther, *The Seminary Priests*, vol. 2 (Ushaw, 1975); M. Sharratt, "Bishop Russell and John Sergeant", *Ushaw Magazine* 253, 1979, 22–37; M. Sharratt ed., *Lisbon College Register, 1628–1813* (Catholic Record Society, vol. 72, 1991).]

² [John Sergeant's *The Literary Life*, dated 1700, has been published in *Catholicon*, vols. ii, iii (London, 1816). The manuscript is in the library of St. John's College, Cambridge, and Dorothea Krook planned to produce a new edition.]

and controversialist in the Roman Catholic cause.

From the year of his return he also became actively involved in the life of the English Catholic community, assuming from the start a position of leadership. He was at once appointed Canon of the Catholic Chapter in London (which had been erected by the first Bishop of Chalcedon in 1624), and soon afterwards became its Secretary, an office he retained until 1667. His *Literary Life* and his historical *Account of the English Chapter*³ testify to the typically devoted thoroughness with which he performed his pastoral and administrative duties. The *Account*, which is mainly a vigorous defence of the rights of the secular clergy against the alleged encroachments of the Jesuits, also gives a touching picture of the suffering of the English Catholics through three periods of persecution. Sergeant himself spent long periods in hiding, under assumed names; wrote most of his books in conditions of great hardship; and several times had to flee abroad, to France or Holland, to escape imprisonment for his repeated violations of the anti-Catholic Penal Laws.

During the half-century between 1655, the year he published his first polemical treatise, *Schism Disarm'd*, and the year of his death (he died, his biographers say, "with a pen in his hand"), Sergeant enjoyed a remarkably full literary life. As an ardent and militant Aristotelian in a dominantly anti-Aristotelian age, he wrote several treatises in defence of Aristotle's philosophy. He attacked the philosophical systems of Descartes and Locke, whom he called "ideists", meaning anti-Aristotelian nominalists. In theology, he crossed swords repeatedly with some of the leading Anglican divines of the period, principally John Bramhall, Jeremy Taylor, John Tillotson, and Edward Stillingfleet, on matters fundamental to the Christian faith; and late in life, at the request of the Catholic Duke of Perth, he wrote a blow-by-blow account of these battles in his very readable *Literary Life*. His theological opinions, it will be remembered, were apparently unorthodox enough to cause him, along with his acknowledged mentor Thomas White, to be called to account for them, first by the doctors of the Sorbonne and afterwards by the Congregation of Propaganda.

Throughout his life Sergeant had many friends and admirers, and also many enemies and adversaries. He loved and exalted

³ [John Sergeant, *An Account of the Chapter* (1706), ed. W. Turnbull (London, 1853). On the English Chapter at this time, see also T. A. Birrell, "English Catholics without a Bishop, 1655-1672", *Recusant History* iv (1958), 142-178; J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975); J. L. Miller, *Papery and Politics in England, 1660-1688* (London, 1973).]

his friends—Kenelm Digby and Thomas White, the great Bossuet, and a host of others; lavishing generous praise on them, and dedicating his books to them with epistles dedicatory that expressed his ardent admiration, in language extravagant even by the standards of an age emotionally less inhibited than ours. With his enemies, he was impatient or fierce, hitting back hard, always giving as good as he got; and with his opponents in controversy (the Anglican bishops, for example), he was ruthless, cutting them down and grinding them in the dust for what he deemed to be their shallowness, evasiveness, or disingenuousness in argument. The personal temper and style of John Sergeant are a subject by themselves, to which I shall return.

Sergeant wrote an astonishingly large number of books: the figure given varies between 32 and 41. Most of them were written in English, because, he said, he wished them to be understood by every Englishman, from the Archbishop of Canterbury down to the humblest country-parson, and by the women as well. Doubtless for the same reason he gave them racy, Anglo-Saxon titles: *Schism Disarm'd* (1655), *Schism Dispatch'd* (1657), *Sure-footing in Christianity* (1665), *Errour Non-plust* (1673), *Reason against Raillery* (1672) are some of the short titles. Nor was he modest about his polemical gifts and achievements. His *Literary Life* is liberally scattered with passages of self-congratulation as he sets down the record of his triumphs, recalling and reliving with satisfaction arguments supremely well conducted, or replies memorably devastating, or the rage or exasperation or stricken silence of an adversary brought face to face with the absurd consequences of his false premises. Yet, in spite of his undisguised delight in his own prowess, it is clear that he admires the excellence of his arguments because they are excellent, not just because they are his own; and there are signs now and then to suggest that, for all his intellectual ruthlessness, for all his seeming lack of charity and mercy, he was yet (as Pope says of Narcissa) “a sad good Christian at [his] heart”.

The development of Sergeant's thought was profoundly influenced by two of his older contemporaries, whose ideas form an integral part of his mature philosophical system. Immediately behind him stands the powerful, controversial figure of Thomas White (1593–1676), whom Sergeant calls “Master Albius . . . that second Aristotle”, and repeatedly acknowledges as his master and guide in all things philosophical. Behind both White and Sergeant stands Kenelm Digby (1603–1665), author of *Two Treatises: Of Body and Soul* (1644), a work they both laud in exalted terms

and expressly state to be a peerless source of light for their own thinking. Digby on his side declares himself to be as deeply indebted to White's earlier writings, indicating the pleasant mutual-admiration atmosphere that seems to have prevailed in their circle. And behind them all stands Aristotle: the Aristotle mainly of the *Organon*, but also of the *Metaphysics* and the *De Anima*. I shall discuss in separate chapters these intellectual antecedents of John Sergeant and their formative influence on his thought.

The powerful figure of Hobbes hovers on the edges of the Digby-White-Sergeant circle, in an elusive relationship that invites further investigation. According to Aubrey, Kenelm Digby was "amicus T.H. [Thomas Hobbes]";⁴ and Thomas White, we have learnt from Anthony à Wood, was a close acquaintance of Hobbes in his later years, engaging with him in philosophical wranglings and squabbings when "either of them was eighty years of age". Hobbes wrote a long commentary on White's *De Mundo* (the work of White's that Digby particularly admired) indicating that he took White seriously, and confirming what Wood says about Hobbes's having "a great respect" for him.⁵ There is a suggestion that Sergeant too might have known Hobbes personally: "He [Sergeant] was closely connected in friendship and error with Blackloe [Thomas White] and also with our famous unbeliever Hobbes", writes Plowden in his *Remarks on the Memoirs of Panzani*.⁶ But this may be a statement of conjecture, not of fact; Plowden, a fierce partisan of the Jesuits, is very unsympathetically disposed towards the "Blackloists" Sergeant and White.

Whatever the exact historical connections may have been, the most general common ground between Hobbes and this group of Catholic thinkers is plain enough. It is in their philosophical rationalism, which they all explicitly affirm against the advancing philosophical empiricism that reaches a high tide in the Royal Society and Locke. The acknowledged source of the rationalism of Digby, White, and Sergeant is Aristotle, who is anathema to Hobbes. Yet the Aristotle of the *Organon* is recognisably present in Hobbes, especially in his early *Elements of Law* and *Of Computation or Logic* (Part I of *De Corpore*); and it can be no accident

⁴ John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. A. Clark (2 vols.; Oxford, 1898), 1. 368.

⁵ Hobbes' Latin commentary on the *De Mundo* has been translated into English, as *Thomas Hobbes: Thomas White's De Mundo Examined*, transl. H. W. Jones (London, 1976).

⁶ Plowden, *Remarks*, p. 284n.

that Hobbes translated Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, absorbing a great deal from it for his theory of man in *Elements of Law* and *Leviathan*. So at least part of the common ground may be traced back to Aristotle, in spite of Hobbes's avowed contempt for everything Aristotelian. And Hobbes's persistent sniping at the Aristotelianism of the contemporary schools actually makes a further bond with Digby, White, and Sergeant, who, as we shall see, also vigorously reject the decadent Peripateticism of their time.

A further light on the connection between Hobbes and our Catholic thinkers is provided by Ernest Moody's penetrating observation about Aristotle's system, that it is in effect a composite of "logical nominalism" and "metaphysical realism".⁷ I think it may be true to say of Hobbes that he adopts substantially the Aristotelian logical nominalism while rejecting the metaphysical realism; and of our Catholic group that they subscribe to the metaphysical realism in the first instance, and adopt the logical nominalism along with it. This would leave the Aristotelian logical nominalism as the specific common ground between them—a ground wide and deep enough, it seems, to accommodate some surprisingly similar positions in logic and epistemology. Not only Sergeant, in the works from which the passages in *Blakloanae Haeresis* were extracted, but also Digby and White, often sound like out-and-out Hobbesians when they are developing their doctrines of language or "discourse", knowledge or "science", the principle of identity, meaning and truth as properties of "enunciations" (propositions), apodeictical certainty as a function of tautological definition ("necessary connexion of terms"), and cognate matters. When they don't sound like Hobbes, the most radical nominalist of the age, they sound like Locke, its leading crypto-nominalist; and these criss-crossings cease to be puzzling or unintelligible if they are traced back to Aristotle's logical nominalism, which makes sense of the Hobbesian/Lockean elements in their avowedly Aristotelian system.

With Moody's valuable distinction in mind, one may even hazard a guess at what those wranglings and squabbings between White and Hobbes at Westminster were about. Perhaps, taking off from the common ground of their shared nominalism in logic, the heated disputes turned on their radical divergences in metaphysics. One may imagine Hobbes affirming and defending his Ockhamist "universe of disconnected singulars",⁸ and White

⁷ Ernest A. Moody, *The Logic of William of Ockham*, (London, 1953), pp. 52–53.

⁸ This happy phrase is used by Meyrick A. Carré in his *Phases of Thought in England* (Oxford, 1949), to define Ockham's metaphysical world.

countering with his Aristotelian realism or conceptualist-realism, which postulates an organically unified external world and a human mind capable of conceptually “appropriating it to itself”. And if, as Anthony à Wood says, some of the scholars present at the disputes thought that “the laurel was carried by White”, this may argue the intrinsic agreeableness to human experience of the Aristotelian world-picture compared with the Hobbesian or Ockhamist.⁹

The particular Aristotelian doctrines appropriated and developed by Digby, White, and Sergeant are to be described in the chapters that follow. Here I just want to touch on certain affinities of intellectual temper and habit that unite them, which I hope will become more fully apparent in the discussion of each individual writer. The most striking of these affinities, especially in their controversial writings, doubtless springs from their common experience of the scholastic disputation of the schools. They may despise the metaphysical and cosmological theories of the schoolmen, but they revere their classic methods of disputation, rigidly adhering to them in their own polemical practice and demanding that their adversaries do the same. Repeatedly they exhort the adversary to observe what they call “the rules of art”: either to “concede” or to “refuse” a premise; or to “distinguish”, and then “concede in this sense”, “refuse in that”; or to declare the thesis or “first definition” to be “ambiguous” and ask for an explanation. These, they insist, exhaust the procedures open to a “controvertist”; and they devote a great part of their polemical energy to exposing their adversaries’ deviations from these sacred procedures. In particular, they reprehend what they regard as the intolerably loose practice of attacking this or that *consequence* of a man’s basic affirmations (definitions, theses) while leaving the affirmations themselves unchallenged; or the practice, dishonest as well as inconsequential, of “re-stating” the point at issue without specifying by what logical rules (“rules of transformation”, they would be called today) they are effecting the re-statement; with

⁹ A further complication, however—another criss-crossing thread—may be present in the picture, arising from the fact that Ockham was taught in the universities along with Aristotle almost to the end of the century. His works were constantly reprinted, the last time as late as the 1670s. Is it possible that Ockham rather than Aristotle is the direct source both of Hobbes’s and the Catholics’ logical nominalism? This is certainly feasible for Hobbes, less so for the Catholics, since they are explicit about their Aristotelian source. But their presumed exposure to Ockhamism in their university studies may well have had some part in the formation of their ideas in logic and epistemology; and this possible Ockham connection is another problem inviting further enquiry.

the result that the “defendant”, unless he explicitly “refuses” the re-statement, may find himself obliged to defend a position he never proposed. John Sergeant, in his battles with the Anglican divines, frequently has occasion to “refuse” such re-statements—which disingenuously change, in his favourite phrase, “the state of the question” in an attempt to evade the real point at issue.

The modern student of philosophy, brought up in our less exacting traditions of philosophical discourse, may well find a peculiar interest, excitement, and inspiration in the spectacle of these scholastic professionals going about their business of exposing logical distempers and applying fierce remedies. And he is likely to be the more impressed when he recognises that their material is not some collection of stock classroom problems, but in philosophy the very conditions of rational experience, and in theology the logical foundations of the Christian faith itself.

Though these neo-Aristotelian rationalists have so much in common, the differences between them are as interesting as the similarities. If style is the man, it is their individual styles that figure the differences. Thomas White’s is difficult enough to daunt the strongest. It is tortuous, over-compressed, and elliptical; rough-hewn and heavy-gaited; all lumps and humps and knots and tangles of obscurity. Kenelm Digby is not difficult in the same way, and full of an infectious vivacity and *joie de vivre*. But his style is often intolerably long-winded, and clogged with super-fine scholastic distinctions and sub-distinctions that proliferate with an uncontrolled exuberance, leaving one worn out by his sheer copiousness.

Compared with his distinguished masters, John Sergeant is a radiant light in a naughty world. Though he grapples with the same abstruse subject-matter, he is neither obscure nor turgid. His style at its best is as clear as a Mediterranean sky, crisp as a new banknote, simple, direct, and forceful—judged, of course, by the staple of English philosophical prose around the middle of the seventeenth century. No Englishman starting to write in the 1650’s could write like Hume and his successors. A Frenchman could perhaps, an Englishman couldn’t; and Sergeant does a good deal better than most of his English contemporaries (perhaps under French influence, Bossuet’s in particular?) in commanding a prose style that in its full maturity has some of the qualities of the ratiocinative prose of the eighteenth century.

In exposition, he is deliberately discursive. Intent on being *understood*, by the simple and sophisticated alike, he is always willing to sacrifice conciseness to lucidity: he is repetitive without

self-consciousness, and never too impatient, or too fearful of insulting the intelligence of his reader, to expound a familiar point with methodical care. The deeper motive for this conscientious pedagogy is rooted in Sergeant's "controversy-logicke"—as, following Thomas White, he called his principles and methods of controversy. It is to reduce the area of unprofitable disagreement to a minimum, by making it impossible for the adversary (who may also be a potential convert) to plead ambiguity in the exposition of the controverted issue as a ground of dissent. Stated in schoolmen's terminology, Sergeant's aim is to make sure that the interlocutor shall be put in the position of being obliged either to "concede" or to "refuse", but never to ask for an "explication".

Sergeant writes, one is tempted to suppose, as he must have thought and spoken: as fast, as fluently, as vehemently, as unselfconsciously. In his earlier works he sometimes falls into passages of what Shakespeare called fustian rhetoric; or, often, into a tone of flaunting cocksureness that justly provokes the "raillery" of his Anglican adversaries. But these immaturities disappear almost completely, once he has reached the height of his powers as a controversialist and can hold his own with such acknowledged masters of the art as Stillingfleet. For the receptive reader, the spectacle of Sergeant in action has the fascination of a drama, in which the dramatic conflict centres, incredibly, on problems of logic and epistemology. One watches as if it were a man-hunt the ruthless tenacity with which he pursues an adversary through every antecedent and consequent of his argument. There is a leisurely ferocity in the way in which, in his own phrase, he "takes a man's book endways" and uncovers, paragraph by paragraph, everything that is loose or shoddy or inconsequential in it. He commands huge resources of irascibility, the sharp edge of which his adversaries are made to feel very often, with no over-civil constraints to blunt the sharpness. And he addresses them in a familiar conversational style, in which the colloquial vivacity of the rhythms is matched by the fertility of the illustrative images, which are almost always homely, forcible, and apt.

One of his gifts comes close to being a touch of genius. One may call it his feeling for the *life* of an argument; which in turn is the source of an extraordinary power of logical discrimination, exercised with ease and rapidity. It expresses itself, this logical discrimination, in a finely-developed sensitiveness to every bend and turn of an argument; an unfailing acuteness in discerning

its minutest structural flaw; a spontaneous appreciation of the qualities of solidity and elegance in a well-made discourse; a spontaneous revulsion from the clumsy butcheries of what he calls "weak discerners".

The logical discrimination is of a piece with his sense of logical *obligation*: what a man is logically obliged to say and do as a consequence of holding the positions he holds. Though a matter of logic in the first instance, this is shown to have important moral implications. Thus, anticipating the charge of un-Christian arrogance that was in fact to be directed against his controversial style, Sergeant remarks pointedly that a "Probability Man" like Tillotson or Stillingfleet has no choice but to observe "a luke-warm courtesy" in theological debate, since his merely "fallible certainty" puts him under a logical obligation always to have in mind the possibility that the other man may be right. But "a Catholick Author who holds his Faith *certain*" is, by the same logic, obliged to stand upon no such ceremony, but instead plainly "to manifest the contrary to be perfectly absurd and nonsense."¹⁰ In other words, it is logically absurd *and* morally reprehensible for a man certain of the absolute truth of his doctrine *not* to affirm it with absolute ("dogmatic") assurance; just as it is logically absurd and morally reprehensible for a man holding his doctrine to be merely "probable" not to affirm it with a tentativeness matching its pitiful uncertainty.

A passage in one of Sergeant's exchanges with Bishop Stillingfleet may serve as a fair sample of his polemical style. It illustrates his gift for dramatising a battle about antecedents and consequents, premises and principles, illative particles and the like, by somehow transforming these colourless logical entities into concrete, quasi-pictorial objects, which often conduct themselves almost like human creatures. He is intent here on exposing the spurious rigour of Stillingfleet's "Thirty Paragraphs", which are supposed to be an answer to one of Sergeant's attacks on his position.

Thirty odd kind of Sentences, Sections, Paragraphs, or I know not what come huddling in one after another of such uncouth fashions, such desperate and disagreeing natures, so void of coherence with one another, that none knows well what to call them . . . Some of them seem deductions from the Principles agreed on. Others seem to contain intire discourses of themselves. The Illative Particle or its Equivalent, which necessarily ushers in all Conclusions, is so

¹⁰ *Schism Dispatch't* (n.p., 1657), p. 15.

rarely heard of here, that one would verily think they were all Premises or Principles; but this Conceit is again thwarted, because divers of them are merely Hypothetical Propositions, involving sometimes such a condition as never was put; others are bare voluntary Assertions and false into the bargain. Some few of them pretend modestly to own themselves Deductions from some other Paragraphs, but yet onely hint it afar off, as it were, not speak it out plainly, as if they fear'd some danger. Others pretend to draw a Consequence in their Close, not at all following from the Part foregoing. Lastly, the whole mass of them hang together like a rope of sand for want of declaring their Relation to others, and though now and then they counterfeit a semblance of some slight coherence, yet their whole Frame is loose and ill-built for want of an orderly and visible dependence of one part on another.¹¹

There is surely something irresistible about a man who can get so worked up about an illative particle, treating its absence in an argument as if it were the sin against the Holy Spirit, calling for drastic acts of penance. I find Sergeant's passion about these things completely original, engaging, and entertaining; and I confess I am writing this book partly to communicate and share the ever-fresh pleasure I have had from contemplating the idiosyncracies of his intellectual temper.

Having said this, I hear the voice of Matthew Arnold warning me against the fallacy of what he called the "historic estimate": meaning, the disposition to overrate a writer whose historical interest is greater than his intrinsic merit. It is a fallacy, Arnold acutely perceives, to which the scholar is particularly liable. The mere fact that he has spent many years immersed in the study of his minor luminary is likely to distort his perspective, transmogrifying the little into the great and leading him to make claims for his hero that no impartial judgment can sustain.

It is good to remember Arnold's warning; but I like to think I have never really needed it. With the Hobbes-connection in mind, I find I only have to open Hobbes's *Leviathan* and re-read a page or two to have any loss of perspective instantly corrected. It needs no more to remind me that John Sergeant is not a master philosopher, but only a superior journeyman. Compared with Hobbes, the range of his life's experience is fatally limited. He has a genuinely, even powerfully, analytical mind, but no creative imagination; tenacity of purpose, but no uncontainable vision; and his view of human life and human problems is too brisk, too simple, too eupeptic.

¹¹ *Error Non-plust* (n.p., 1673), pp. 14-16.

So he is no “great” or major philosopher, only an exceptionally able and interesting minor one. Yet there is point in the comparison with Hobbes other than that of proving the obvious. What Sergeant has in common with Hobbes (White and Digby too, but Sergeant most of all) is the essential, the universal, stamp of the rationalist temper, its spontaneous faith in the introspective powers of the human mind, and its intense, irreflective delight in the exercise of these powers. “If you will be a philosopher in good earnest”, writes Hobbes in his Epistle to the Reader in *De Corpore*, “let your reason move upon the deep of your own cogitation and experience . . . Your method must resemble that of the creation.” This is the deepest, most inward bond between a Hobbes and a Sergeant. The shared faith cuts across many doctrinal differences; and the shared delight, though it can never transform a Sergeant into a major philosopher, measurably contracts the distance that in every age separates the masters from the best of the journeymen.

CHAPTER TWO

ARISTOTLE: MASTER OF DEFINITIONS AND NOTIONS

... Though the language is diverse, the whole great literature on method that fills the scientific writing of the seventeenth century is at bottom a series of footnotes to the *Organon* of Aristotle. Indeed the more fully the record of late medieval and Renaissance thought is studied, the clearer it becomes that the most daring departures from Aristotelian science were carried on within the Aristotelian framework and by means of a critical reflection on the Aristotelian texts—however various the sources of the ideas that fertilized that criticism. The “father” of modern science, in fact, turns out to be none other than the “Master of them that know”.¹

In this passage, in a memorable article, J.H. Randall sums up the thesis and conclusion of his study of the origins of Galilean science. He demonstrates, in brilliantly convincing detail, that the Aristotelian tradition in scientific thought enjoys an unbroken continuity from the beginning of the thirteenth century to the time of Galileo, and thus into the seventeenth century; that the anti-Aristotelian polemics of the seventeenth century obscure this continuity; and that the “new science”, so far from being new, is actually “the culmination of the co-operative efforts of ten generations of scientists enquiring into methodological problems in the universities of Northern Italy”—most notably at Padua, where Galileo held the Chair of Philosophy up to 1640. This prolonged and intensive speculation on scientific method, the fruits of which the seventeenth century inherits, takes the form of “a persistent and searching reconstruction of the Aristotelian tradition” by the constructive criticism of the Aristotelian texts and doctrines.²

Anyone who wishes to experience directly the continuity of the Aristotelian tradition into the seventeenth century should read Hobbes’s *Elements of Law and Of Computation or Logic* (Part I of *De Corpore*), then immediately read or re-read the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Topics*, and the *Sophistical Elenchi*. He will find that the continuity ceases to be matter for argument. I say deliberately “continuity”, not “influence”, for it is distinctly not merely a matter

¹ J.H. Randall, Jr., “The Development of Scientific Method in the School of Padua”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* i (1940), p. 203. [This article has been republished as J.H. Randall, *The School of Padua and the Rise of Modern Science* (Padua, 1961).]

² *Ibid.*, pp. 177–180.

of "influence"—not a matter of this or that insight, distinction, term, or image taken from an acknowledged source. A living tradition is not an "influence", it is the very medium in which men's thinking takes place; and right to the end of the seventeenth century Aristotle was that medium. Aristotle *was* philosophy; and this is why no doubt speculative men were not in the habit of acknowledging their debt to Aristotle, any more than a mathematician acknowledges his debt to the multiplication table. This is how Aristotle is present in Bacon and Galileo, in Hobbes, in Descartes and Locke. And the energy with which they repudiate Aristotle is too often proportionate to the evidence in their work of the inescapability of Aristotle. In English thought in the seventeenth century, this is especially true of Bacon and Hobbes; Locke's Aristotle is mediated by Descartes, and further diluted by the simplified Baconianism of the Royal Society.

Our group of Aristotelians, Digby, White, and Sergeant, represent the obverse side of the seventeenth-century medal. They affirm explicitly, and expound and defend in detail, the fundamental Aristotelian positions; and they at least do not fail to acknowledge and exalt their distinguished source. Thus Thomas White entitles one of his principal works *Peripateticall Institutions*, explaining that he has called them Peripatetical "because throughout they subsist upon Aristotle's principles, though the conclusions sometimes dissent".³ Sergeant's *Method to Science*,⁴ which he counted as his *majus opus*, is in the main a re-statement of the historic Aristotelian positions in epistemology and metaphysics; and Digby's frequent tributes to Aristotle, though typically lavish, are also precise, in singling out specifically Aristotle's achievement in logic and epistemology: for him, Aristotle is "the most judicious orderer of notions and directour of men's conceptions that ever lived", "the greatest master that ever was of finding out definitions and notions".⁵

³ Thomas White, *Peripateticall Institutions* (London, 1656), Authour's Design. [Some emphasis does need to be placed on the last clause, in which, Edward Grant has suggested, "British understatement may have had its finest hour". (*In Defence of the Earth's Centrality and Immobility: Scholastic Reactions to Copernicanism in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1984), p. 8.) For my own discussion of the extent of White's scholasticism in relation to cosmology, see "'Torn between two obligations': the compromise of Thomas White", in T. Sorell ed., *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz* (Oxford, 1993).]

⁴ John Sergeant, *The Method to Science* (London, 1696).

⁵ Kenelm Digby, *Two Treatises* (Paris, 1644; facsimile reprint, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1970), p. 5.

Their interest in the “logic of science” is, however, only a part of their larger philosophical enterprises, which encompass metaphysics and theology besides epistemology. Consequently, they draw upon more of Aristotle than just the *Organon*, leaning heavily also on the *Metaphysics* and the *De Anima*. Their knowledge of the Aristotelian texts is thus comprehensive as well as deep; and they claim to stand for the original, undefiled Aristotle, not the Aristotle corrupted on the one hand by the uses of the Galilean science, and on the other by what they regard as the decadent scholasticism of their time. Though in their intellectual temper and their idiom they often show the marks of the Peripatetic rationalism of the schools in which they were brought up, they grapple directly, “at the source”, with the great Aristotelian doctrines; and they produce re-interpretations of those doctrines whose originality testifies both to their own philosophic gifts and to the inexhaustible vitality of the scholastic tradition in which those gifts were nurtured.

What they learnt from Aristotle may be set out under the following main heads: —

(i) The Aristotelian metaphysics, which they interpret as a synthesis of metaphysical realism and conceptualism. This “moderate realism”, as it is sometimes called today, avoids on the one hand the naive realism that postulates a one-to-one correspondence between the external world and the conceptions of the human mind, this being the kind of primitive realism that Digby, White, and Sergeant deride in the over-simplified Aristotelianism of the schoolmen of their time. On the other hand, it also eschews the pure conceptualism that may all too easily slip into quasi-nominalism and subjectivism—what Sergeant called “ideism” in his critique of Descartes and Locke. The Aristotelian synthesis, as they understand it, predicates reality *equally* of the contents of “the (external) world” and the contents of “the human understanding”; and it resolves the problem of the human understanding’s *knowledge* of “the world” by that single bold dictum in the *De Anima* which declares human knowledge to be “the soul’s appropriation of the world to itself”.

(ii) The Aristotelian logic and epistemology, set out mainly in Aristotle’s *Categories*, which they interpret as a doctrine of “aspects” or “points of view” or “types of relation”. Sergeant invents for it a strikingly original name, calling it the doctrine of “considerabilities”: “considerability” in the sense of the aspect, or point of view, or type of relation from, or under, which the object is to be “considered”. This doctrine is another fundamental element

of their Aristotelianism, constantly invoked by White and Sergeant in their polemical writings.

(iii) The Aristotelian principle of identity: what Bishop Butler defined as the principle that “every thing is what it is and not another thing”. Our writers adopt it in the epistemological sense in which it is used in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics*—not in the narrower purely logical sense in which it is more commonly understood nowadays, as just another name for the “rule of substitution”, which, among other rules, regulates logical discourse. In the epistemological sense, it is affirmed to be the fundamental condition and co-implicate of all discursive or rational thought. If in a given situation we do not recognise that this is this, not that, or (for the positivistically inclined) if we cannot agree that this is this, not that, then rational discourse must necessarily cease. This is the sense in which White and Sergeant use the principle of identity as one of the basic principles of their “controversy-logicke”.

(iv) The Aristotelian theory of science: “science” in the inclusive, classical sense, derived from Plato, of “systematic knowledge”—“systematic” in that it exposes to view, completely and coherently, the grounds or “causes” of what it claims to know, thus forming a “system”; Plato’s “knowledge”, as distinct from “true opinion”. For our neo-Aristotelians, the great virtue of Aristotle’s account of “science” is that it is a thoroughly rationalist conception, science or knowledge conceived as a deductive system, and thus as a method of *proof* or *demonstration*. It is not the Royal Society empiricist conception—science or knowledge as inductive and thus a method of *discovery*—which Sergeant, along with Digby and White (and Thomas Hobbes), either ignores or explicitly repudiates.⁶

(v) The Aristotelian theory of language (“language, meaning, and truth”), developed in *Of Interpretation* and other places in the *Organon*. An integral part of the Aristotelian logic and epistemology, it decisively shows what a modern writer has called the “logical nominalism” that co-exists with the metaphysical realism in Aristotle’s system.⁷ This unique Aristotelian amalgam is eagerly adopted by all our writers, and in particular Sergeant, with far-reaching consequences for their systems of thought.

⁶ This valuable distinction between science as proof or demonstration, and science as discovery, is made by J.H. Randall in the article cited above; and also in his *Aristotle*, (New York and London, 1960), p.40.

⁷ See Moody, *Logic*, pp. 52–53.

(vi) Finally, Aristotle's account of "dialectics" and "didactics" in the *Topics* profoundly influences their principles and methods of controversy. Though they do not make a theoretical issue of the distinction, they constantly invoke it in practice, scrupulously observing the famous "rules" of each kind of discourse and extending their scope in fresh, original ways.

To explain properly all the Aristotelian doctrines I have enumerated would require in effect an exposition of Aristotle's system as a whole. As I cannot attempt this here, I shall restrict myself to explaining a little more fully those doctrines adopted by Digby, White and Sergeant that particularly show the originality of their interpretations and renovations of Aristotle, leaving the rest to be glossed in my discussion of each author's system of ideas.

1. "CONSIDERABILITIES"

The doctrine of "considerabilities" is a re-statement of the classic Aristotelian solution to a fundamental philosophical problem straddling metaphysics and epistemology. Like the original doctrine, the re-statement undertakes to explain the relation between the real and the intelligible or knowable: the question it attempts to answer is, how does the real *become* the intelligible, the knowable, the known? The answer is reducible to three basic affirmations:

(a) Our knowledge of the real is always and necessarily "modal"—always, that is, the whole world (reality) viewed under this or that mode, or category, or aspect, or point of view, or "considerability".

(b) Every modal view of the world, *because* it is modal, because it is the real seen under this or that considerability, must necessarily be an *abstraction* from the real as concrete whole, and therefore must be a partial, incomplete, imperfect, inadequate view of the real.

(c) Yet precisely because it is inadequate (partial, incomplete, imperfect) as a consequence of being an abstraction from the concrete totality of the real, each modal view of the real is "clear and distinct"—that is, intelligible, or knowable.

The argument may be re-stated in syllogistic form as follows: —

The knowable is the intelligible;

the intelligible is the clear and distinct;

therefore, the knowable is the clear and distinct.

But clearness and distinctness can be attained only by abstraction;

therefore, the clear and distinct is the abstract.

To abstract *means* to view under a particular mode or category or aspect or point of view or considerability;

therefore, the clear and distinct is the modal.

But the knowable is the clear and distinct;

therefore, the knowable is the modal;

that is, our knowledge is always and necessarily modal; and (to recapitulate) because modal, therefore partial and inadequate; yet because partial and inadequate, i.e. abstract, therefore clear and distinct; therefore intelligible or knowable; therefore knowledge.

This, in the barest outline, is Aristotle's doctrine of the *Categories* as Digby, White, and Sergeant understood it. Its philosophical implications and the uses to which they put it will appear later. However, for the further elucidation of the doctrine, I shall mention just one of its philosophical corollaries: the re-statement or re-definition it offers of the well-known antithesis between the "correspondence" and "coherence" theories of truth. The doctrine of considerabilities in effect cuts across this distinction, by taking account of both as valid and necessary criteria, but not *antithetically*. When knowledge is taken to be the soul's appropriation to itself of the whole world (reality) under this or that aspect or point of view or considerability, "correspondence" does not mean what it means in the more naive accounts of the correspondence view: that there is an outer (real) world and an inner (mental) world existing in permanent contrast and opposition to each other, and that knowledge is a "copying" or "imaging" or "representing" of the outer world in the inner. For the doctrine of considerabilities, correspondence means that the world is *brought into* the understanding in the act of knowing. The real world *becomes* the mental world by the mind's act of appropriation: there is always but one single world, which is, at once and indivisibly, the real *and* the mental world—the world as it is "in nature" (Aristotle's favourite term) *and* the world as it is in the human understanding. Similarly, when knowledge is taken to be the soul's appropriation to itself of the world under this or that aspect or point of view or considerability, "coherence" does not mean self-consistency *per se*. It means the unity and homogeneity of the world "in nature", reconstituted in the human mind as a coherent world of thought by the very act of being known under a particular aspect or considerability. The two criteria, in other words, operate as correlatives, not antithetically. Where there is genuine correspondence—that is, where it *is* the real world that

has been appropriated by the mind—there is always, necessarily, coherence; and conversely, where there is genuine coherence, there is also, always and necessarily, correspondence.

This account of correspondence-coherence obviously leaves some crucial questions unanswered. I shall mention the two most obvious. The first is the classic question of philosophical scepticism: How do they know there *is* a real world to be appropriated by the human understanding? How do they know that what they suppose the mind to have appropriated is not a subjective illusion, a figment, a chimera of the appropriating mind? Second, granted there is a real world to be appropriated, how do they know it is the *real* world that has been “brought into” the mind, and not some simulacrum of their own making?

The first question presents no serious difficulty to a group of seventeenth-century Aristotelians who happen also to be Christians—as well as trained theologians and professional defenders of the Catholic faith. They have the privilege of knowing, by the light of the revealed truth of the Bible confirmed and perpetuated by the ineluctable authority of the Catholic Church, that God created the world by the divine process described in Genesis 1. This, for them, establishes once and for all the reality of the world, or, in Sergeant’s phrase, “things in their metaphysical verity”—leaving no room for what they would see as a madman’s sceptical doubts.

Their answer to the second question, insofar as it may be inferred from their doctrine, is more equivocal. The question must have seemed to them already answered in the full statement of their doctrine, but if challenged, their answer might have been something like the following. Where the world appropriated by the human understanding has the properties of genuine unity or “coherence”, it *must* be the real world that has been appropriated, since *only* the real world, having been created by God, genuinely possesses these properties. And since a rational mind is always capable of recognising genuine unity and coherence, the real world “as it is in the mind” can always be distinguished from a fictive invention of our own.

The answer is plainly unsatisfactory, in assuming what most people will think has to be proved, or at least argued: that the human mind (*every* human mind?) is indeed capable of recognising genuine unity or coherence wherever it occurs. Besides, what *is* “genuine” unity or coherence; and how—by what marks, by what criteria—shall we distinguish it from the not-genuine, the false or spurious? This is not the only begged question in our

authors' philosophical system; others will emerge in the more detailed examination of its several parts and the uses to which they put it. Question-begging, however, is an inescapable weakness of most, if not all philosophical systems of this order of generality; and in this respect these seventeenth-century renovators of Aristotle are no worse than the master, from whom they inherit the begged questions along with the system.

2. THE PRINCIPLE OF IDENTITY

The following are a few of the places in which Aristotle affirms the important truth, that the fundamental condition of rational thought, rational discourse, and science or knowledge, is the recognition of identity and difference—meaning, of course, true identity and true difference: —

Argument about definition is mostly concerned with questions of sameness and difference. (*Topics*, 102a.9)

Besides scientific knowledge, there is its originative source [viz. "rational intuition"] which enables us to recognise the definitions [i.e. to recognise in e.g. "Man is a rational animal" that "rational animal" is identical with "man"]. (*Post. An.*, I. 72b.24)

When [in induction] people need to secure the universal [i.e. in an inductive generalisation, such as "All birds are two-legged and feathered"], they use the phrase "in all cases of this sort". But it is one of the very hardest things to distinguish which of the things adduced are "of this sort", and which are not: and in this connexion people often confuse each other, the one party asserting the likeness of things that are not alike, and the other disputing the likeness of things that are. (*Topics*, 157a.25–30)

People who are puzzled to know whether one ought to honour the gods and love one's parents or not, need punishment; while those who are puzzled to know whether snow is white or not, need perception. (*Topics*, 105a.5)

When [in a dialectical argument] men lose their tempers, it may perhaps be impossible to make one's inferences straightforwardly as one would wish: we have to do as we can. (*Topics*, 161b.10)

The first passage is, I hope, self-explanatory. The second stresses the dependence of "scientific" (deductive) knowledge on the recognition of identity and difference in the primary definitions which are the "starting-point" of the deductive system. This recognition is accomplished by *nous*—the power variously translated as rational intuition, intellectual intuition, intellectual "seeing", or insight. In the third passage, the difficulties of (inductive) classification into genera, species etc., are presented as difficulties

of gaining recognition of and assent to true resemblances and differences: the crucial problem is, How shall we recognise which things *are* “of this sort”? The fourth and fifth passages are aphoristic applications of the principle. Thus, those who are incapable of recognising in the physical world that white is a property of snow, are in the desperate condition of lacking the basic power of perception; they “need perception”. Analogously, those who are incapable of recognising in the moral world that honour is due to the gods and love to parents, are in the likewise desperate condition of lacking a basic moral sense; therefore—presumably in the interests of society and/or of their immortal souls—they have to be “punished”. And with neither class of person is it possible to “argue”, since in both instances the fundamental condition of rational discourse is absent: namely, the power to recognise the identity of the (true) properties of things—whiteness as a property of snow, honour as a property of man’s attitude to the gods, love as a property of his attitude to parents. And this is also the case “when men lose their tempers”, as in the last passage: anger incapacitates men for the recognition of identity and difference, and thus makes them incapable of rational discourse.

To illustrate how the recognition of identity and difference operates in practice, I have invented an example of a master-scholar situation, in which the master wishes to instruct the scholar in the meaning of the terms “analytic” and “synthetic” as used in current philosophical discourse to designate two kinds of proposition, and to prove to him that the statement of a theory or hypothesis in natural science may be said to be both analytically and synthetically (“empirically”) true or false. He draws on the scholar’s presumed knowledge of Newton’s theory of gravitation for the purpose of this demonstration: —

The master: Newton’s theory of gravitation is an instance of a proposition that is both analytically and synthetically true. Do you understand what I mean?

The scholar: No, I don’t.

The master explains: From proposition x (the theory of gravitation), we derive or deduce other propositions x^1 , x^2 , x^3 . If x^1 , x^2 , x^3 have been correctly deduced from x —that is, in accordance with the rules of transformation laid down as correct or habitually used—we say that x^1 , x^2 , x^3 are “analytically” true. Is that clear?

The scholar: Yes.

The master: Now in this instance x is the theory of gravitation, which, as you know, affirms that every particle of matter in the

universe attracts every other particle with a force proportionate to the product of the masses of the two particles, and inversely proportionate to the square of the distance between them. The propositions x^1 , x^2 , x^3 , deduced from x , are respectively as follows: —

x^1 : small bodies tend to fall towards the centre of the earth;

x^2 : bodies tend to fall to the earth less rapidly when they are high above the earth;

x^3 : planets moving under the influence of a large sun move in elliptical orbits.

These three propositions have been correctly deduced from the theory of gravitation. Do you understand?

The scholar either says “yes”, and then the discussion can proceed. Or he says “no—I don’t see that x^1 , x^2 , x^3 are derived from x ”, in which case the discussion comes to a halt. For the scholar has failed to recognise that the present situation is a particular instance of the class of phenomena “correct derivation”, i.e. has failed to make a crucial identification; and the master has no choice but to stop the discussion and dismiss the scholar as “stupid”, or at any rate “unteachable”. The discussion goes on, however, if the scholar has said “yes”, i.e. has recognised that x^1 , x^2 , x^3 are here particular instances of “correct derivation”. So: —

The master: We proceed then to the empirical verification of the propositions x^1 , x^2 , x^3 . That is, we perform certain handling operations—set up experiments, make observations, measurements, calculations, and describe our results in the form of the mathematical propositions y^1 , y^2 , y^3 . We compare propositions x^1 , x^2 , x^3 with propositions y^1 , y^2 , y^3 ; and *if they are the same*, we say that proposition x (Newton’s theory of gravitation) from which x^1 , x^2 , x^3 were correctly derived, is now “synthetically” (or “empirically”) true. Now, the propositions y^1 , y^2 , y^3 are in fact the same as x^1 , x^2 , x^3 . Do you see this?

The scholar: No, I can’t see that they are the same . . .

The discussion again stops, and cannot proceed until, if ever, the scholar does “see”—by Aristotle’s “rational intuition”, or whatever the power may be that effects the seeing.

This is how the Aristotelian principle of identity enters into a typical discussion of the “didactic” kind, to be described in the next section. Its operation will be more fully illustrated in John Sergeant’s polemical exchanges with his Anglican adversaries, whose arguments he claims to reduce to ashes by the application of Aristotle’s divinely inspired principle.

3. DIALECTICS AND DIDACTICS⁸

Plato's Socrates invented and used the dialectical method, occasionally slipping into the didactical. Plato in his later works used almost exclusively the didactical method, usually in the guise of the dialectical; but he never attempted explicitly to define the methods being used, and it was left to Aristotle to do the job, in typically Aristotelian fashion. In one sentence in the *Prior Analytics* (1.24a22–26) he formulates the difference between the two approaches with brilliant incisiveness. Here is the sentence:

The demonstrative [i.e. didactical] premise differs from the dialectical, because the demonstrative premise is the assertion of one of two contradictory statements (the demonstrator does not ask for his premise, but lays it down) whereas the dialectical premise depends on the adversary's choice between two contradictories.

Starting with dialectics: a dialectical argument, proceeding by question-and-answer between the "questioner" (Socrates) and the "answerer" or "adversary" (Glaucón, Thrasymachus, Gorgias, Polus, Callicles), always starts from a premise or primary definition which the adversary (answerer) has chosen from two contradictories proposed to him by the questioner. Thus, Socrates in the *Gorgias* may ask Callicles, "Would you say, Callicles, that pleasure is or is not the measure of the good?" Callicles, the hedonist, answers: "Yes, of course, pleasure is the measure of the good"; and this becomes the obligatory "premise" or starting-point of the dialectical argument. The crucial point is, that the adversary, being by definition ignorant, muddled and confused, and often perverse as well, whose left hand doesn't know what his right hand is doing, who lives by "opinion" with no conception of what "knowledge" is—this adversary, being what he is, always, necessarily, chooses to affirm the false proposition of the two contradictories he is proffered: he wouldn't be the adversary in a dialectical dispute if he didn't. So the questioner, Socrates, has no choice but to start from a false premise; and everything else distinctive of the dialectical method follows from this. It follows, for example, that Socrates can never prove that his own contrary position (that pleasure is not the measure of the good) is true; he can only prove that the adversary's position is false by showing that it is fatally self-contradictory. He can only show that the adversary's position is riddled with self-contradiction by "trapping" him into assent to propositions that are radically inconsistent with his

⁸ I have discussed this topic more fully in my book *Three Traditions of Moral Thought*, Appendix A: "Some Principles of Socrates' Dialectical Method".

original affirmation—viz. that pleasure is the measure of the good; and he can only trap him into assent to these fatally damaging propositions by the circuitous methods that the Socratic adversaries found so exasperating, and, often, by those sophistical arguments that led Aristophanes in *The Clouds* to deride him as the master sophist of his time.

This is the dialectical method, the method of instruction of the market-place. The didactical method, by contrast, is the method of the academy, and presupposes, not a “questioner” and “answerer”, but a “master” and “scholar”—the master to instruct, not question, and the scholar to learn, not argue. The defining feature of this method is that, as Aristotle says, the master “does not ask for his premise, but *lays it down*”. That is to say, he affirms, as the premise or primary definition of the argument, that, for example, pleasure is not the measure of the good; he elucidates the meaning of the key terms (“By ‘pleasure’ I mean . . . ; by ‘the good’ I mean . . . ; by ‘measure’ I mean . . .”); and, having elucidated, he requires the scholar to assent to this primary proposition. If the scholar, having understood the meaning of the terms, refuses his assent, the didactical argument immediately stops. As Hobbes was to say, in his own memorable statement of the didactical situation:

When a master is instructing his scholar, if the scholar understand all the parts of the thing defined which are resolved in the definition, and yet will not admit of the definition, there needs no further controversy betwixt them, it being all one as if he refused to be taught.⁹

If the scholar assents to the premise or primary definition, the master proceeds to demonstrate the validity of the proposition, “Pleasure is not the measure of the good”, by a rigorously deductive chain of syllogistic reasoning. The scholar is at every stage of the demonstration allowed to ask for explanations and elucidations; the master never requires him to give a blind assent to any proposition in the chain of deductions. He may ask, for instance, for elucidations of the terms of the intermediate propositions; or for a definition or description of the logical rules by which any step in the argument is made to follow from the preceding step. But he is not allowed to *dispute* the master’s definitions or the rules of logic by which he makes his inferences; if he does, it is “all one as if he refused to be taught”.

This in the briefest outline is the method of didactics, first

⁹ *Of Computation or Logic*, vi.15; *Works* I.84.

practised in Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, which became the basis of the scholastic method of the universities of medieval and renaissance Europe, and continued to be the standard method of instruction to the end of the seventeenth century. Digby, White, and Sergeant, like all their contemporaries at Cambridge and Oxford, were intimately familiar with it; and, doubtless because of their conscious Aristotelianism, they knew its "rules" better than most, believed in them as the only "method to science", and insisted on their being observed by their Anglican adversaries in controversy—whose arguments, they constantly complained, were scandalously sloppy, matching the untenable positions they were defending.

CHAPTER THREE

KENELM DIGBY: "TWO INCOMPARABLE TREATISES"

In 1644 Sir Kenelm Digby published his *Two Treatises*, "in the one of which" (the sub-title explains) "the Nature of Bodies, in the other the nature of Man's Soule is looked into", the treatise on man's soul being directed to the "Discovery of the Immortality of Reasonable Soules". The book was widely acclaimed in Digby's large circle of philosophical friends, which included Thomas White and John Sergeant. Digby in his book had lavishly praised White's *De Mundo*, calling its author "our learned countryman, and my best and most honoured frend, and to whom of all men living I am most obliged (for to him I owe that litle which I know; and what I have, and shall sett downe in all this discourse, is but a few sparkes kindled by me att his greate fire . . .)".¹ White reciprocated by extolling the author of the *Two Treatises* as "that eminent Person and excellent Philosopher" upon whose "justly-to-be-envy'd Book, of the Immortality of the Soul" he had drawn heavily in his *Peripateticall Institutions*. And John Sergeant was moved to express his admiration in a long poem (probably the only one he ever wrote) entitled "Verses to Sir Kenelm Digby: Upon his Two Incomparable Treatises of Philosophy", published in c.1653. A brief examination of the *Two Treatises* will readily show what White and Sergeant learnt from it, and why they regarded it as a formative influence on the development of their thought.

1. THE "DESIGN"

In the Epistle Dedicatory and the Preface to the First Treatise, Digby explains the twofold object of his undertaking. The first and inferior enquiry, into the nature of body, is intended to be no more than propaedeutic to the other study, "the most important and the most weighty, within the whole extent of humane nature, for a worthy and a gallant person to employ himselfe about"—namely, the immortality of the soul. And, he adds, "in an age so philosophical" it becomes a scholar and gentleman to establish this sublime truth, not in the manner of the vulgar, on "infallible authority", but as a matter of "evident science": a

¹ *Two Treatises*, p. 144.

declaration striking the first note of the Aristotelian rationalist *leitmotif* of the *Two Treatises* that is to be an inspiration to White and Sergeant in developing their own theory of knowledge ("science") as a system of "evident" demonstration.

Nevertheless, that first inferior treatise *Of Bodies* is more than twice the length of the second: a disproportion Digby feels obliged to explain, arguing that it was necessary to give so much attention to the properties of "body" in order to establish first a negative definition of "spirit"—what it could *not* be—before determining its positive attributes.² The evidence of the text, however, suggests a reason for the bulkiness of the First Treatise less pious but more interesting than this. It soon becomes clear that, at least while he is engaged in the baser study, Digby is as intensely animated as Hobbes in *De Corpore* by the ambition to create "a system of the world" that shall account for all "those operations which seem most admirable in nature" *and* be demonstratively true. Accordingly, like Hobbes, Digby sets out to create a science of nature which will be a demonstrative science of quantity. Such a science, he claims, will be separated on the one hand from the vulgar "qualitative" physics of the schoolmen, which, like the Gresham College physicists, he heartily despises; but it will also be distinct from the laborious experimentalism of the Greshamites themselves, whose experiments "concluded nothing" and therefore could yield only hypotheses, not a demonstrative science on the model of mathematics. The science of nature Digby has in mind is thus a science in the true Aristotelian sense: demonstrative, not hypothetical; of quantity, not of occult qualities or powers; and also thoroughly "corpuscularian" and "mechanistic"—for Aristotle, Digby repeatedly insists, was as good a corpuscularian as any modern Cartesian. This somewhat startling claim for Aristotle's physics provoked astonishment and indignant dissent from several quarters.³

Here are two of Digby's own statements of his "design", in which the quantitative and deductive character of the science he is endeavouring to construct is stressed: —

² *Ibid.*, p. 350.

³ See Digby, *Ibid.*, pp. 342f., for his view of Aristotle as a corpuscularian physicist—a view supported by Thomas White in *An Exclusion of Scepticks from All Title to Dispute* (London, 1665), his attack on Joseph Glanvill's *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (London, 1661). Among the indignant dissenters were Alexander Ross in *The Philosophical Touchstone* (London, 1645), p. 60, and Glanvill in his "Defence of the Vanity of Dogmatizing" in *Scep sis Scientifica* (London, 1665), Preface and pp. 36–38.

I have taken my beginniges from the commonest things that are in nature: namely, from the notions of Quantity and its first differences: which are the most simple and radicall notions that are, and in which all the rest are to be grounded. From them I endeavour by immediate composition of them, and derivation from them, to bring downe my discourse to the Elements, which are the primary and most simple bodies in nature. From these, I proceed to compounded bodies . . .⁴

Again:

In delivering any science; the cleerest and smoothest methode, and most agreeable to nature, is to begin with the consideration of those thinges, that are most common and obvious; and by the dissection of them to descend by orderly degrees and steppes (as they lye in the way) unto the examination of the most particular and remote ones. Now, in our present intended survey of a body, the first thing which occurreth to our sense in the perusall of it, is its *Quantity*, bulke, or magnitude . . .⁵

However, despite his enthusiasm for his scientific enterprise, he never forgets the inferiority of body to soul, and the unfitness of lingering on "corporeal things". Accordingly, with typical Digbean panache, he declares his rationalist, anti-empiricist contempt for being over-exact about the detailed "explication" of natural phenomena: —

A gallant man, whose thoughts flye att the highest game, requireth no further insight into them [corporeal things], then to satisfy himselfe by what way they may be performed; and deemeth it farre too meane for him, to dwell upon the subtilest of their mysteries for science sake.⁶

One may imagine how this would have appalled the master empiricist, Francis Bacon, who believed there was nothing better a philosopher of science could do than "dwell upon the subtilest of [nature's] mysteries for science sake". But Digby is an Aristotelian rationalist about science and a pious Christian about body *versus* soul; so he has only the "desire and intent" to show

from what principles, all kindes of corporeall operations do proceed; and what kind of operations all these must be, which may issue out of these principles: to the end that, I may from thence, make a steppe to raise my discourse to the contemplation of the soule; and shew, that her operations are such, as cannot proceed from those principles.⁷

⁴ *Two Treatises*, Preface.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Epistle Dedicatory.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Preface.

With the influence of Digby's *Two Treatises* on White and Sergeant in mind, I shall extract from the book his interpretations of the Aristotelian doctrines that they assimilated and developed.

2. "CONSIDERABILITIES"

Digby expounds his "theory of the soul" and its metaphysical basis in the opening chapters of the Second Treatise. The metaphysics soon shows itself to be the classic Aristotelian synthesis of realism and conceptualism, worked out with admirable completeness and consistency. Digby develops its implications with a thoroughness, an impartiality, and a vivacity of interest in whatever specific problem he happens to be tackling that are as attractive to the modern reader as they must have been to his contemporaries. But it was doubtless the sheer originality of his philosophical perceptions that most impressed White and Sergeant, making the profound impact on their own thinking which they acknowledge and re-acknowledge with ever renewed gratitude.

Among the most original products of Digby's philosophical imagination is his reading of Aristotle's *Categories*, which Sergeant was to call the doctrine of "considerabilities". The key points of the doctrine have been outlined above (ch. 2), showing how it argues its central affirmations: that all human knowledge is "modal"—that is, reality grasped under this or that category or aspect or point of view or "considerability"; that each modal view of reality ("the thing") is necessarily partial or inadequate, and *therefore* "clear and distinct"; and that it is always the *whole* "thing", the whole of reality, that is thus inadequately apprehended under each mode, category, or considerability.

John Sergeant's statement of the doctrine is much simpler, more lucid, and more forceful than either Digby's or White's; Digby's in particular tends to be couched in the logic-chopping, long-winded, obfuscating idiom and style of the schools. But this perhaps is to be expected of a pioneer who has been brought up in that tradition: it seems that he can more easily break with the schoolmen's ideas than with their style of thought and expression. At any rate, he *is* the pioneer, and one must imagine White and Sergeant sitting up with excitement as they recognise the gold nugget of the new idea buried in the meandering prose of a passage such as this:—

... Our understanding hath a custome for the better discerning of thinges, to impose upon a thing as it is under one notion, the exclusion of itself as it is under other notions. And this is evident unto all schollers, when the marke of exclusion is expressly putt:

as when they speake of a white thing, adding the reduplication, *as it is white*: which excludeth all other considerations of that thing, besides the whitenesse of it: but when it cometh under some particular name of the thing, it may deceive those that are not cunning: though indeede, most men discover it in such names as we call abstracted: as humanity, animality, and the like. But it easily deceiveth when it cometh in concrete names; as it doth in the name of *Part* in generall, or in the names of particular partes; as a hand, an eye, an inch, an elle, and others of the like nature: for as you see that a part excludeth both the notion of the whole, and of the remaining parts: so doth a hand, an eye, an elle, exclude all the rest of that thing, whereof the hand is a hand, and the elle is an elle, and so forth. Now then, as every man seeth evidently that it cannot be said; the *wall as it is white is plaster or stone*: no more can it be said, that the hand of a man is his foote; because the word *hand* signifieth as much in itselfe, as if the man were taken, by reduplication, to be the man as he is hand, or as he hath the power of holding . . . And thus it is cleare how the difficulty of this point, ariseth out of the wrongfull applying the conditions of our notions, and of names, to the objects and thinges which we know: whereof we gave warning in the beginning.⁸

Sometimes, however, Digby can be more concise, as in the passage in which he stresses the difference-in-unity (or unity-in-difference) affirmed by the doctrine of considerabilities:

In the thinges, all that belongeth unto them is comprised under one entire Entity: but in us, there are framed as many severall distinct formall conceptions, as that one thing sheweth itselfe unto us with different faces. Every one of which conceptions seemeth to have for its object a distinct thing because the conception itselfe is as much severed and distinguished from another conception or image, arising out of the very same thing that begott this, as it can be from any image painted in the understanding by an absolutely other thing.⁹

He is still more concise when he invokes the doctrine in his polemic against the two forms of ultra-realism known to him, the scholastic ("Peripatetic") and the Platonic. Against the schoolmen, engaged in endlessly multiplying entities, Digby insists that our knowledge of "things" is mediated by our conceptions, and warns against the fallacy of identifying our modal conception of a thing with the thing itself:

If I be not very cautious, and in a manner wrestle with the bent and inclination of my understanding (which is apt to referre the distinct and complete stampe it findeth within itselfe, unto a distinct and complete originall character in the thing) I shall be in danger before I am aware, to give actuall Beings to the quantity,

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2

figure, colour, smell, tast, and other accidents of the apple, each of them distinct one from another, as also from the substance which they clothe, because I find the notions of them really distinguished (as if they were different Entities) in my minde.¹⁰

In this way Digby repudiates, in the name of Aristotle rightly interpreted, the false Aristotelianism of the contemporary schools, which from “an unwary conceiting that things are in their own nature after the same fashion as we consider them in our understanding”, have reduced Aristotle’s great realist-conceptualist synthesis to a realism pure and simple-minded.

On the same grounds, he also rejects Plato’s extreme realism. He calls it “the second error: the conceiving of many distinct things as really one thing”, and proceeds to explain how it arose:

From this conception, Plato’s Ideas had their birth; for he finding in his understanding, one universall notion that agreed exactly to every Individuall of the same species of substance, which imprinted that notion in him; and conceiving that the picture of anything must have an exact correspondence with the thing it representeth; and not considering that this was but an imperfect picture of the individuall that made it: he did thence conceive, there was actually in every individuall substance one universall Nature running through all of that species, which made them be what they were.¹¹

In other words, to give the Platonic forms “a real and actual subsistence in nature” is, Digby contends, as wrong-headed as to inflict upon matter a host of “real species”; and Plato’s error too may be traced back to his “not considering” that every conception we form of “the thing” is “but an imperfect picture of the individual that made it”: a partial, inadequate (“imperfect”) conception of the thing viewed under a particular aspect or considerability.

But, being an Aristotelian realist and conceptualist, Digby is of course at one with Plato in insisting on the reality and unity of the thing of which our modal conceptions (“apprehensions”) necessarily give us an incomplete and imperfect picture:

The apprehension of *Being*, is the glew that joyneth our apprehensions corresponding to our wordes . . . For when diverse apprehensions may be thus joyned together, it is indeed, that one and the same thing affecting us severall wayes and under different considerations; those indifferent impressions do begett different apprehensions in us; and so, till we examine the matter, every one of them seemeth to be a different thing: but when we trace these streames up to the fountaine head, we discerne that all of them

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

do belong to one and the same thing; and that by being in that thing, they are among themselves the very same thing, however they affect us variously . . . Consequently, nothing is more fitt to joyne together in our mind those different apprehensions, than the apprehension of *Being*; which maketh us apprehend as one thing, those notions which really, and in the thing itselfe, are but one.¹²

3. THE PRINCIPLE OF IDENTITY

Digby's sense of the crucial importance of Aristotle's principle of identity is evident in his discussion of what he calls "enunciations", meaning propositions or judgments. He defines enunciations or judgments as "conjunctions of apprehensions"; and in describing what "judgment" is, he declares the recognition of identity and difference to be the fundamental condition of discursive thought and the ultimate ground of our assent and dissent:

All our *judgment* or *deeming* is but an apprehension of identification, or something immediately following out of it: and . . . a settled *judgement* or *assent of the mind* is as it were a limbe, or branch, or graft in our soule; so that we find that our perceiving of identification between two thinges, or our seeing that the one is the other, is that by which our soule encreaseth.¹³

The kind of "increase" Digby has in mind would not indeed commend itself to an empiricist like Locke as a form of real increase at all. For Locke, identical propositions are "trifling" or "uninstructive", because the only propositions he recognises as instructive are what Kant called "synthetic" propositions—what we would call today empirically verifiable propositions.¹⁴ But for Digby, as an Aristotelian rationalist, identical propositions *are* instructive, in the way that all "analytic" propositions are instructive—by making clear what Digby calls the "connexion of Terms", that is, the full *meaning* of the terms. Once the meaning of the terms is understood, the truth of the proposition is self-evident:

If we should meete with one that were not satisfied of the verity of them [i.e. identical propositions], we would not go about to prove them to him, but would only apply ourselves to make him reflect upon the wordes he speaketh, without using any further industry to gaine his assent thereunto: which is a manifest signe, that in such propositions, apprehending or understanding them, is the same thing as to know them and to consent unto them: or at least, that they are so necessarily conjoynd, as the one followeth

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 366.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 402–403.

¹⁴ See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1690), IV.8.2, 3.

immediately out of the other, without needing any other causes to promote this effect, more than that a man be disposed, and willing to see the truth: so as we may conclude, that to understand a proposition which openly carrieth its evidence with it, is to know it.¹⁵

Digby goes on to explain that such definitions as “a man is a reasonable creature” are self-evident precisely because they are really identical propositions, and thus analytically true. For in such definitions, “the Identification of the extreame is of itself so manifest that when they are but explicated, it needeth no further prooffe”: as, in this instance, “if we understand what is meant by a *Man* and what by a *reasonable creature*, . . . it needeth no further prooffe to make us know it.”¹⁶

He goes further, however. The principle of identity is not only a guarantee of the analytic truth of propositions (though not, of course, of their synthetic or “empirical” truth). It is also, Digby contends, the condition of all knowing, and *as such* “instructive”—instructive, that is, as a fundamental epistemological truth, determining all our acts of assent:

. . . Because they [identical propositions] bring no acquisition of new knowledge unto the soule . . . , I lett them passe without any further mention, upon this occasion having produced them once before, only to shew by an undeniable example [i.e. a man is a reasonable creature], what it is that maketh our soule consent unto an enuntiation, and how knowledge is begotten in her, that we might afterwarde apply the force of it to other propositions.¹⁷

Digby’s appreciation of this cardinal point in Aristotle’s epistemology is a good measure of his philosophical insight, as well as of his genuine Aristotelianism. It kindled a corresponding appreciation in John Sergeant, stimulating him to develop the Digbean interpretation of the principle of identity in his own philosophical system, and to use it in his defence of the Catholic rule of faith in strikingly original ways.

4. LANGUAGE AND SCIENCE: “LOGICAL NOMINALISM”

The central place of language in Digby’s theory of knowledge or “science” is affirmed in a remarkable passage in the Preface to the Second Treatise, typically Digbean in its philosophical audacity and its soaring visionary rhetoric. In order to demonstrate the thesis of the Second Treatise, that the soul is an immaterial

¹⁵ *Two Treatises*, p. 369.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

substance and therefore immortal, the author enjoins us to proceed as follows:

... We must looke upon those actions of man, which are peculiarly his: and upon those things which result out of them, and are called, *Opera* or *labores hominum*; as houses, Townes, Tillage, Handicrafts, Armes, shippes, Commonwealthes, Armies, Bookes, and the like; in which great mens lifes and thoughts have beene spent. In all these we find one generall thriddle, to runne quite through them; and that all of them are composed of the same stuffe, and are built upon the same foundation: which is, a long chaine of discourses, whereof every little part or linke is that which schollers do call a *Syllogisme*: and *Syllogismes* we know are framed of *enuntiations*; and they of single or uncomposed *apprehensions*. All which are actions wrought by the understanding of a man ... so that we may be sure, we shall have left nothing out of enquiry, concerning *Mans actions* as he is a *Man*, if we beginne with anatomizing his first bare apprehensions; and so goe on by degrees, compounding them, till we come to faddome those great and admirable machines of bookes and workes, which he (as I may say) weaveth out of his owne bowels; and the like of which, is done by no other creature whatsoever, upon the face of our contemptible Earth.¹⁸

What the passage declares is that all knowledge, and indeed every work of man's creative genius, is a function of discourse or language. Knowledge, Aristotle had said, is of things-as-they-are-in-the-understandig, that is, of conceptions or "apprehensions". But conceptions have no existence apart from language: to conceive is to articulate in language, in the form of "enunciations" (propositions, statements, judgments). Therefore, conceptions or "apprehensions" are "enunciations"; and our knowledge, being a system of apprehensions, is a system of enunciations—that is, language or discourse. Thus the Second Treatise, *Concerning Man's Soul*, is reducible to a study "of Apprehensions, of Enuntiations or Judgements, and of Discourses"; and all the works of man (*opera* or *labores hominum*) "are composed of the same stuff and built upon the same foundation: which is, long chains of discourse".

In this view of human knowledge as discourse, Digby is once again essentially Aristotelian, taking his stand now on Aristotle's terminist logic or "logical nominalism". It is not surprising therefore that his theory of knowledge or "science" should assume a distinctly nominalistic colouring, with interesting variations of hue. Sometimes the hue is that of Hobbes's outright nominalism, sometimes that of Locke's crypto-nominalism; but the source is always the Aristotelian logical nominalism that co-exists in Aristotle's system with his metaphysical realism. Digby's account of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 353–354.

the operations of language, for example, is often close to that of Hobbes in Chapters 4 and 5 of *Leviathan*:

It is true, wordes serve to express thinges: but if you observe the matter well, you will perceive they doe so, onely according to the picture we make of them in our owne thoughts, and not according as the thinges are in their proper natures. Which is very reasonable it should be so; since the soule that giveth the names, hath nothing of the thinges in her but these notions, and knoweth not the thinges otherwise then by these notions: and therefore can not give other names but such as must signify the thinges by mediation of these notions.¹⁹

Again, having said that “the apprehension of things knowne to us by our senses, doth consist in certaine respects [i.e. relations] betwixt the two things”, he goes on to declare that “respect or relation hath not really any formall being, but only in the apprehension of man”; for man “by comparing them [the apprehensions] giveth birth to [i.e. creates] the nature and being of respect”—an affirmation of the purely mental existence of universals that Hobbes could scarcely improve upon. Moreover, says Digby, there is no way of defining or describing this process of creating relation “but (like Being) by the sound of a word, which we are agreed upon to stirre up in us such a notion; for in the thinges, it is not such thing as our notion of it is.”²⁰ This is, or seems to be, a conventionalist view of language, in which meaning is created by the arbitrary imposition of names, and agreement about the usage of each name.

The common ground with Hobbes is again evident in Digby’s definition of a “simple apprehension”. A “right” apprehension is defined, not by reference to its correspondence with the things—not, that is, by demonstrating, or asserting, that it is “the-thing-as-it-is-in-the-understanding”; but, in true Hobbesian fashion, by reference to the *behaviour* associated with it. The question asked is not, “Does this apprehension correspond to the thing? Is it, or is it not, the-thing-as-it-is-in-the-understanding?”—but rather, “If this apprehension is true, or if that is false, what in either case follows *in behaviour*?” In Digby’s own words:

That we may duely understand, what a right Apprehension is, let us consider the pre-eminence that a man who apprehendeth a thing rightly, hath over him who misseth of doing so.²¹

This “pre-eminence” consists in being able to *do* certain things as a consequence of “apprehending rightly”, which it is not

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 359–360.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

possible to do if one has not thus apprehended. And in answer to the question, "What, then, is *wrong* apprehension?", or, more broadly, "What is your theory of error?", Digby answers in effect: Try it and see: try and see whether you can *do* the same things from a "wrong" as from a "right" apprehension. This is what we *mean* by the terms "right" and "wrong" here: that behaviour of one kind is possible where there is one apprehension, and not possible where there is another apprehension; and the first apprehension we call "right", the other "wrong". Thus Digby:

If he have framed a right apprehension of a sive, he will not employ it in drawing water; if of a beetle, he will not go about to cutt with it: neyther will he offer, if he have a due apprehension of a knife, to cutt stone or steele with it, but wood, or what is softer.²²

In his discussion of "how a judgement [or enunciation] is made by the understanding", Digby seems to approach Locke's theory of ideas, in that he sees the generation of enunciations out of simple apprehensions as a matter of "simple addition". As in Locke's system, a "complex idea" is the sum of its constituent "simple ideas", so in Digby's, "enunciation" is the sum of a specifiable number of "simple apprehensions": "Enunciations or Judgements . . . are the materials whereof *discourses* are immediately framed: as when of the two apprehensions of *knife* and of *sharpe*, we make this enunciation, *the knife is sharpe*."²³ And, again as in Locke, the "agreement or disagreement" (i.e. coherence) of the simple apprehensions of which the enunciation is composed, appears to be the sole criterion of the enunciation's truth or falsity.

But there is a crucial difference. Digby insists that this union of simple apprehensions into enunciations is metaphysically real—an organic, not a merely mechanical, union. He thus differentiates himself both from the Lockean doctrine of nominal essence, and from Hobbes's totally nominalistic system. So, Digby urges, when we consider

. . . in what manner two differing simple apprehensions, do become joyned to one another . . . we shall find, that they are *not tyed together like severall distinct thinges in one bundle*, or like stones in a heape, where all that are comprised under one multitude, are yet circumscribed within their owne limits, and thereby are wholly distinguished from each other; but that they are as it were *grafted upon one stocke*; which being common to both, giveth the same life to both; and so becoming one with each of them, maketh them be one and the same thing betweene themselves. And this is the notion

²² *Ibid.*, p. 356.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

of *Being* or *Existence*, in the subject we speake of: which . . . is the Basis and foundation of all other apprehensions; and by being common and indifferent to all, is the fittest glew to unite those that are capable of such conjunction.²⁴

Compare this with Hobbes:

. . . There is in men's aptness to society, a diversity of nature, rising from their diversity of affections; *not unlike to that we see in stones brought together for building of an edifice*. For as that stone which by the asperity, and irregularity of figure, takes more room from others, than itself fills; and for the hardness, cannot be easily made plain, and thereby hindereth the building, is by the builders cast away as unprofitable, and troublesome: so also, a man that by asperity of nature, will strive to retain those things which to himself are superfluous, and to others necessary; and for the stubbornness of his passions, cannot be corrected, is to be left, or cast out of society, as cumbersome thereunto.²⁵

Digby's use of the very same image as Hobbes, in effect to deny what Hobbes affirms in this passage, is a nice measure of the difference between Hobbes's nominalistic "universe of disconnected singulars"²⁶ and Digby's organic world-view grounded in the Aristotelian metaphysic of substance-and-accidents. By reaffirming the Aristotelian realism against the encroaching nominalism of the age, Digby becomes a guide and inspiration to Thomas White in his attack on the scepticism of Glanvill's *Vanity of Dogmatizing*, and to John Sergeant in his campaign against the "ideism" of Descartes and Locke.

When the realism has received its full emphasis again and the Aristotelian synthesis has been restored, the relation between the conception and the thing is seen to be something other than a relation of mere correspondence. For by means of the conception, Digby contends, echoing the *De Anima*, we actually possess the thing, indeed *become* the thing; by its conceptual power, the soul appropriates the world to itself:

What then can we imagine, but that the very nature of a thing apprehended, is truly in the man, who doth apprehend it? And that to apprehend ought, is to have the nature of that thing within ones selfe? And that man, by apprehending, doth become the thing apprehended; not by change of his nature unto it, but by assumption of it unto his.²⁷

²⁴ *Ibid.* (my emphases).

²⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan* I.15; p. 99.

²⁶ Carré in his *Phases of Thought in England* uses this happy phrase to define Ockham's metaphysical world.

²⁷ *Two Treatises*, p. 356.

How Aristotle's logical nominalism inspires Digby's "linguistic" analysis of many philosophical problems, and how Aristotle's metaphysical realism saves his system from becoming the universe of disconnected singulars of the Ockhamite/Hobbesian nominalist, is illustrated again in his treatment of certain problems that were to preoccupy philosophical minds in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Locke, for example, was disturbed by the fact that men persistently use "thing-language", the language of substance, to talk about their "ideas"—their conceptions, notions, or apprehensions.²⁸ Digby recognises the problem, but remains unperturbed by it. His system does not oblige him, as Locke's does, to treat this fact as an instance of deplorable human delusion; nor indeed does he have to regard it as a major problem at all. He simply appeals to the Aristotelian realist foundation of his epistemology, and pronounces our use of thing-language to be a natural disposition of the human mind. "All the negotiations of our understanding, tradeth in all that is apprehended by it as if they were things", he explains; and, being natural, the disposition is no cause for disquiet.

A similar equanimity informs his handling of a situation that was to become a key issue for Locke and others—that arising from men's failure to recognise certain problems in philosophy as disputes merely about "names", meaning, and the definition of terms. Digby again recognises the existence of this kind of pseudo-problem, and easily, almost casually, dismisses it. He cites the great Gilbert's dispute about the question, "Which is the North, and which the South Pole of the [load]stone?", and remarks that this is surely "only a question of the name":

If by the name of north and south, we understand that end of the stone which hath that vertue that the north or south pole of the earth have; then it is certaine, that the end of the stone which looketh to the south pole of the earth, is to be called the north pole of the loadstone; and contrariwise, that which looketh to the north, is to be called the south pole of it. But if by the names of north and south pole of the stone, you meane those endes of it, that lye and point to the north and to the south poles of the earth; then you must reckon their poles contrariwise to the former account. So that the termes once defined, there will remaine no further controversye about this point.²⁹

Similarly, in discussing the *vis formatrix* postulated by contemporary philosophers of nature, Digby again takes a thoroughly functional, logical-linguistic view of the problem. He denies that

²⁸ *Essay*, III.2.4.

²⁹ *Two Treatises*, p. 194.

a *vis formatrix* is a necessary hypothesis for natural philosophy, but declares himself willing to retain the term, provided it is given a clear functional meaning:

To effect this worke of generation, there needeth not be supposed a forming vertue or *Vis formatrix* of an unknowne power and operation, as those that consider thinges suddainely and but in grosse, do use to putt. Yet, in discourse, for conveniency and shortnesse of expression we shall not quite banish that terme from all commerce with us; so that what we meane by it, be rightly understood; which is, the complexe, assemblment, or chayne of all the causes, that concurre to produce this effect; as they are sett on foote, to this end by the great Architect and Moderator of them, God almighty, whose instrument nature is: that is, the same thing, or rather the same thinges so ordered as we have declared, but expressed and comprised under another name.³⁰

Some forty years later, the sceptical, anti-Aristotelian philosophers of the Royal Society, notably Robert Boyle and John Locke, were to regard it as a great innovation in philosophical analysis to show the reducibility of many problems to “a matter of definition”, or (in Digby’s idiom) “a question of the name”. Locke’s analysis of the physicians’ dispute about the meaning of “liquor” is a *locus classicus* for this theme.³¹ Less well-known perhaps is Boyle’s similar enquiry into the “vulgarly receiv’d notion of nature”:

I have sometimes been so paradoxicall or (if you please) so extravagant as to entertain as a serious doubt what I formerly intimated viz. *whether nature be a thing or a name?* I mean, whether it be a real existent being or a notional entity, somewhat of kin to those fictitious terms that men have devised that they might compendiously express several things together by one name . . .

And again:

Whilst this vein of framing paradoxes yet continued, I ventur’d to proceed so far as to question whether one may not infer from what hath been said that the chief advantage a philosopher receives from what men call nature, be not that it affords them, on divers occasions, *a compendious way of expressing themselves?* . . . Since . . . when a man tells me that nature does such a thing, he does not really help me to understand or to explicate, how it is done.³²

Boyle may feel he is “framing paradoxes” in proposing such a reductionist view of the sublime notion of nature: Digby has no such misgivings, knowing that his Aristotelian logical nominalism is protected from Royal Society scepticism by his Aristo-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

³¹ *Essay*, III.10.16.

³² *A Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Receiv’d Notion of Nature* (1685), in *Works*, ed. T. Birch (6 vols.; London, 1772), IV.370–371 (my emphasis).

telian metaphysical realism. Thus shielded and fortified, Digby can pursue his linguistic-analysis line with complete serenity; proving again the freedom of radical philosophical enquiry permitted by the Aristotelian synthesis, which White and Sergeant, following Digby's lead, are to exploit far beyond the limits of Digby's pioneering enterprise.

5. TWO LANGUAGES

This brief review of the philosophical benefits Digby bestowed on White and Sergeant would be incomplete without a mention of the curious doctrine of the "two languages" he develops in his *Two Treatises*, which Sergeant in particular takes hold of and repeatedly invokes in his philosophical and theological works. The distinction and the thesis are simple enough, as Digby's marginal heads show. There are "two sorts of wordes to expresse our notions; the one common to all men, the other proper to schollers", and "great errors arise by wresting wordes from their common meaning to expresse a more particular or studied notion". His attitude to the "common" or "natural" meanings of words may owe something to Herbert of Cherbury's apostatisation of the common notions; like Herbert, Digby also uses those "primary and sincere impressions which nature had freely made in them" as a stick with which to beat the metaphorical distortions of the "scholars"—that is, the learned professionals and specialists. He admits indeed that "to learne the true signification of such wordes, we [the scholars] must consult with those that have the knowledge and practise of them"; but he immediately adds the qualification, that "to understand the other kind of plaine language, we must observe how the wordes that compose it are apprehended, used, and applyed by mankind in generall: and not receive unto this examination the wrested or Metaphoricall senses of any learned men."³³

The hostility to the language of the scholars is plain. But the philosophical point of this Wordsworthian enthusiasm for "the language of men" emerges when he insists that it is in "the common notions"—that is, in the common usages of words—that the new physics, "the science of quantity", must take its starting point:

And therefore the first worke of schollers is to learne of the people, *Quem penes, arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi*, what is the true meaning and signification of these primary names, and what notions

³³ *Two Treatises*, pp. 5–6.

they begett in the generality of mankind of the thinges they designe [designate]. Of the common people then, we must enquire *what Quantity is*: and we shall soone be informed, if we but consider what answere any sensible man will make upon the suddaine to a question whereof that is the subject: for such unstudied replies expresse sincerely the plaine and naturall conceptions, which they that make them, have of the thinges they speake of.³⁴

Digby's "common people" are evidently no more common than Johnson's Common Reader was to be; if they were, it would be difficult to conceive how their notion of "quantity" could be of any use to the physicist. What he has in mind is doubtless the intelligent, educated layman of his time, who was likely to take an ardent interest in the new science and had a good chance of understanding it—provided (this is Digby's point) its discoveries were not wrapped up in an unintelligible technical-scientific language. And this perhaps is the deeper cultural issue Digby is touching on in his emphasis on the dependence of the language of science upon the language of "the common people". His doctrine may represent an early effort to ward off the threatening dichotomisation of the old unified view of the physical universe into two distinct "world-pictures", the scientist's and the plain man's. The unity is to be preserved, Digby intimates, by insisting that the scientific picture is derived from, and therefore subordinate to, the plain man's; and he makes his point in terms of the distinction between the "two languages", believing that the relation between the two languages could be taken as emblematic of the relation between the two worlds.

These possible broader implications are of course speculative. What is not speculative is the influence of Digby's notion of the two languages on John Sergeant in his major theological undertaking, to show that the "rule of faith" for Christians must be "infallibly certain". It is the basis of Sergeant's own distinction between what he calls "practical self-evidence" and "speculative self-evidence", the first being the self-evidence suited to the needs of the plain man, the second that suited to those of the philosopher-theologian or "scholar". By invoking this distinction, Sergeant avoids the danger of making his Christian rule of faith a rule designed exclusively for the salvation of philosophical and theological cognoscenti. It ensures that the universal redemption offered by the Catholic Church shall remain available to all men, while allowing him to pursue his demand for a rule of faith that shall be "speculatively self evident", or apodeictically true.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

CHAPTER FOUR

THOMAS WHITE: A "SECOND ARISTOTLE"¹

By temper as well as profession Thomas White is, first and last, a controversialist. His most original doctrines in philosophy and theology are almost always developed in response to the demands of particular polemical situations. For example, the best exposition of his theory of knowledge or "science" is to be found in his *Exclusion of Scepticks*—an attack on Joseph Glanvill's *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*. Another of his key works is *Controversy-Logicke* (1659), a systematic exposition of his principles and methods of controversy, which he applies in his own theological polemics with exemplary rigour and consistency. Indeed White's reputation in his time as a formidable intellect rests in no small part on his practice of the art of controversy. In a typical White polemic, the philosophical foundations of every argument are exposed to view. First principles are constantly invoked, in defence as in attack; every conclusion is referred to its premises, every inference to its antecedent; the task of exact definition is never evaded, and its consequences never shirked. He pursues his ideal of absolute consistency in argument with relentless energy, giving no quarter to the adversary's lapses into inconsequentiality or any other kind of logical ineptitude.

Polemic of this order is in fact a form of philosophical discourse. This is true of almost every polemical treatise White wrote: it is imbued with the "passion for system" of the philosophical mind; and in this too his works were a model and inspiration to his disciple John Sergeant. Accordingly, I shall consider White's contribution to the Aristotelian rationalism of Sergeant and others of his circle, mainly through his controversial writings, starting with his attack on Glanvill in *An Exclusion of Scepticks*.

1. WHAT IS SCIENCE?

White's attack has a double object: to prove that Glanvill's "sceptical" view of truth is philosophically untenable and therefore false; and that the consequences of maintaining it are disastrous for the foundations of the Christian faith. Thus he heads his First

¹ John Sergeant, *Non Ultra: or a Letter to a learned Cartesian settling the Rule of Truth and First Principles upon the Deepest Ground* (London, 1698), p. 38.

Plea, "There is Demonstration and Science", and proceeds to outline a theory of knowledge as inflexibly rationalistic and "didactical" as that of the *Posterior Analytics*.

The First Plea is devoted mainly to establishing a crucial distinction—that between *science* and *prudence*. "Science" yields apodeictical truth, "prudence" only hypothetical truth; and White starts with the definition of "prudence". This "prudence", he says, is no more than "a power of conjecturing aptly". It depends on "two previous [i.e. antecedent] powers"—what he calls "Art" and "Experiment". "Experiment" appears to denote the bare facts of sense-experience, which are always particulars; White calls it "matter of fact", which "for the most part is true, but necessitates not assent, because not universal". By "art" he evidently means empirical hypothesis, which orders and generalises the "matter of fact" of "experiment" or sense-experience. So he defines "art" as follows:

Though it owes its birth to Experience, yet is sustained by universal and unfailing Rules: But, itself understands not the necessary and indefectible efficacy of its Rule; but is content with the testimony of ever-corresponding effects.²

This is empirical knowledge, based on the mere "testimony of the ever-corresponding effects". And because Glanvill, as a leading spokesman for the empiricism of the Royal Society, contends that this is the *only* kind of knowledge attainable by the human mind, he stands condemned as a "sceptic".

White's definition of "art" is interesting also for its striking resemblance to the Platonic definition of "true opinion", in contrast to "knowledge", developed in the *Meno*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Republic*. White may despise Socrates and Plato compared with the divine Aristotle,³ calling them "Probability Men"—a phrase John Sergeant will pick up and apply to great polemical effect to his adversaries, the Anglican bishops. Yet what White says about "art" and "prudence" as a whole is almost exactly what the Platonic Socrates says about "true opinion": that like knowledge, it judges correctly, and is thus a dependable guide to action; but it does not know the "grounds" or "causes" of its judgements, proceeding "intuitively", as we might say today; and in this it is different from and inferior to true knowledge. The resemblance is still more marked in a passage in the Third Plea, entitled "'Tis Imprudent to deny the existence of Sciences", in which White

² *Exclusion*, p. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

describes "art" as "an entire and complete Habit of Certainties", and demonstrates by a typically syllogistic argument that Glanvill has no grounds for pleading the incorrigible uncertainty of "art" or empirical knowledge as a reason and justification for his scepticism. So he concludes:

Art, therefore, what is it but a Rule which commonly fails not. This, then . . . is certain, that Art for the most part, fails not . . . The whole course of our actions is grounded on this that *commonly* it fails not. Wherefore since what never fails is certain, *Art*, which in most cases never fails in most cases is certain; and whoever denies this, either out of ignorance or stomach, opposes himself to very Nature and the Order of things.⁴

This sounds like a good paraphrase of *Meno* 97, made by someone who really understands what Socrates was talking about: the great Platonic distinction between knowledge and true opinion is there in White's epistemology.

If this is "art", the defining element of "prudence", what then is "science"? White answers, again echoing the Platonic Socrates: "science" is distinguished from "art", not by its subject-matter, but by the nature of its interest in that subject-matter which it has in common with "art". What science is interested in is "the necessitating and necessarily connected Principles" that are always implicit in the exercise of art, from which the empirical hypotheses of art derive both their power of guiding men in the practical affairs of life, and their power in natural science of successful prediction:

. . . 'Tis clear the Decrees of Art, since she is veracious, have necessitating and necessarily connected Principles, which force the effect of Art to be not possibly otherwise than as Art teaches 'twill succeed. Whence follows that the Subject Matter of Science and Art is the same; and every Art has a proper Science due to itself, if the nature of Man would stretch to attain it . . .⁵

The proper business of the "scientist", the man of knowledge, is thus plain. It is to uncover these "necessitating and necessarily connected Principles" that inhere in the subject-matter common to art and science, by which the "artist" is unknowingly guided in his discoveries of practical or "prudential" truths; to define these principles; and methodically to draw out their full implications. The drawing out of the implications of the principles is what White means by "demonstration"; and to demonstrate in this sense is to create a *system* of knowledge, or "science".

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

This definition also in effect answers the question: What is the *method* of arriving at science thus defined? Being an Aristotelian rationalist, White does not in the first instance ask the question of the empiricists, "How do we come by these first principles of a science?"—or, "What is their empirical basis?" Instead he asks, "How do we *prove* that they *are* first principles?" "Proof" here is used in a purely analytic (not synthetic) sense; and the first principles are verified solely by analytic criteria of truth, without reference to their empirical (synthetically true) basis—or how they were "come by".

White is by no means incapable of appreciating the empirical side of the process of scientific discovery: he shows it in his recognition of Aristotle as a great empirical scientist, when he commends Aristotle's passion for observation and "experiment", along with his deductive genius. His greatness, says White, was in "very concisely hunting after truth by Experiments and marrying with the inspection of Nature the power of deducing Consequences, design'd to show the world Science in Physics and Metaphysics worthy to vye with Geometry".⁶ White's emphasis, however, is overwhelmingly on the deductive process in the making of a science; and deduction is treated as, essentially, a matter of logic and language—a logical-linguistic phenomenon. Thus the first principles of a given science are viewed as its primary *definitions*; scientific method is a process of drawing out the full *meaning* of these primary definitions; and scientific knowledge becomes, as with Digby, "long chains of discourse".

If "science" is long chains of discourse, it follows that the right questions to ask about scientific method ought to turn on the properties of discourse; and White correspondingly sets out his questions at the outset of his enquiry into the "Method of Science". First, does the syllogism, the "unit" of discourse, possess the property of apodeictical certainty? Second, can human industry create a *system* of syllogisms that will be apodeictically true? Third, has such a system of discourse the power, like geometry, to generate a multitude of true inferences?⁷

White's answers to these questions are given within the framework of a broadly Aristotelian theory of discourse. But he betters his instruction in many ways, and the details of his analyses are full of acute and original perceptions. Taking it as his main task to explain the operations of the syllogism, White affirms, first,

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

the central importance of the principle of identity as the fundamental condition of rational discourse. Here are two of his shortest and clearest statements of this key Aristotelian doctrine, which he holds in common with Digby, and which John Sergeant is to adopt and use repeatedly for the confutation of the Anglican bishops:

Let us fix the first step, and assert, as invincibly known, and unshakeable by any art of the Scepticks, that *What is, is*, or that what terminates and specifies an Identical Proposition as its Object is self-evident.⁸

And in the Seventh Plea, which "Inquires after the Causes of our Modern Shortness in Science", he confirms:

An Understanding . . . adapted to Science . . . knows that those things are certain which the Understanding, out of a steady sight that *a Thing is a Thing*, or that *the same is the same*, has fixt to and in itself; and patiently waits till the distinction between the entanglements shew itself [i.e. until the various "considerabilities" of the "thing" have been disengaged from one another] and the confusion [of the concrete *individuum*] vanish.⁹

Next, by the light of the principle of identity, White distinguishes between what he calls "self-evident" propositions, meaning logical (or tautological) axioms, like "A whole is the sum of its parts", and what he calls "self-known" propositions—that is, definitions, like "A man is a rational animal". Finally, he invokes the principle again to explain the mode of operation of the syllogism itself. His analysis of "self-known" propositions is a fair sample of White's skill in the scholastic art of "distinguishing":

. . . A self-known proposition is in some sort composed of an Identical Proposition and another otherwise evident, or taken for evident . . . [For example]: In this Proposition, A Man is an Animal, these two Propositions shroud themselves, *One of the Animals is one of the Animals*; and that other, that *Rational is a determiner of Animality*. Now this latter is not affirmed, but taken for granted, either from Sense, as it were, or some other way supposed to be known and past doubt [perhaps, by Aristotle's "rational intuition"]; and in force of the former Identification, 'tis concluded that a man is an animal . . . [Similarly, in the Proposition, "Number is either even or odd"] . . . two Propositions lie in [it]: One an Identical One, for example, that *even and not-even are all, or comprise all, the kinds of number*; and another otherwise known, viz. that *such a Number, for example, Ten, is a certain Number*. This latter is known as it were by sense; or suppos'd, not affirmed: The former is equivalent to this *All Number is all Number*. And one of all the numbers, for example, *Ten*, is affirmed to be one of the even or odd; because by force

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

of the contradiction between even and not-even, even and odd must of necessity comprise all Numbers, or even and odd and all Numbers be the same.¹⁰

This is dry stuff; but for John Sergeant it had the force of a philosophical revelation, providing him, as we shall see, with brand new ammunition for his battles with the Protestant divines.

Having laid down the syllogistic “method to science”, White now proceeds to his analysis of the leading natural science, physics. Predictably, for an Aristotelian (and perhaps crypto-Platonist), he takes the model of all sciences to be geometry, which proceeds to its conclusions by an orderly sequence of identical propositions, and owes its apodeictical certainty to this rigorous observance of the principle of identity. If the natural sciences have not attained to “that scientificall Method which shines so clear in *Arithmetic* and *Geometry*”, but “are wholly entangled in Logical and Equivocal Trifles, and fill babbling Volumes of fopperies”, the reason is their failure to observe this excellent rigour of geometry. Nevertheless, White concedes, the case of physics is not altogether desperate. There is hope of its becoming a genuinely demonstrative science of quantity if it will consent to imitate the wisdom of the geometers: if it will lay down clear, unambiguous definitions of its primary concepts, draw out the full logical implications of these definitions, and thus create that “long chain of discourse” which is the name of a genuine science.¹¹

This uncompromisingly rationalist view of the science of physics comes out with particular force in White’s observations on Glanvill’s Humean account of causality. Glanvill has argued that causality is a matter of what he calls the “concomitancy” (what Hume was to call the “constant conjunction”) of so-called cause and so-called effect. Upon this White comments:

The twentieth Chapter [of Glanvill’s book] renders manifest the eminence of Peripateticism above all other Methods, by its very impugnation of it. For, it assumes, it cannot be known that one thing is Cause of another, otherwise than because they are found together [“concomitant”, or “constantly conjoined”]: which we deny not to be an occasion of suspecting, but no Argument of Causality; for, if nothing else be clear, ’twill be still unknown which of the two is the Cause, which Effect.¹²

Peripatetic method, however, is able to circumvent this difficulty, by the simple expedient of so *defining* the “cause” that the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 23–24.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

"effect" is logically (and thus necessarily) implied by the definition. So White explains:

But the Peripateticks conclude not A to be the cause of B *till, defining both, they find, out of their very Definitions, that A cannot be, but it must follow out of its intrinsicals that B is.* For example, A Peripatetick collects that Fire is the Cause of Heat; because Heat is nothing else but [i.e. is defined as] Atoms flowing from Fire: and on the other side, he knows that Fire cannot exist, but it must send out such particles.¹³

Another, more far-reaching statement of this thoroughly Aristotelian conception of science, and of the man of science or "philosopher", appears in White's repudiation of Glanvill's argument for the vanity of dogmatising, drawn from his famous observation about the "climates of opinion". If the prevailing opinions of the "philosophers" (thinkers, scholars, scientists) of one age can differ so radically from those of another age, is it not misguided vanity, Glanvill asks rhetorically, to affirm any truth absolutely or "dogmatically"? This for White is a contemptibly relativist doctrine, and his reply is more than usually peremptory:

Not a jot stronger, to establish the impossibility of Science, is the argument from the variety of Opinions amongst those that are call'd Philosophers. For first it must be evident that they *are* Philosophers before their judgements deserve esteem in Philosophical matters. Do they profess to Demonstrate? Do they model their books in Euclid's Method? Do they interweave Definitions with self-known truths? And admit no other for proof? All which may be observ'd in Aristotle and his antient interpreters, though not express'd in Euclid's form. These things if they do, either they are not rational, or all will be of the same mind; as Geometricians are. If they neglect these, 'tis not a pin matter for their judgments in Philosophy.¹⁴

There is one further aspect of White's theory of science or knowledge to be considered: his view of the relation between physics and what he called "metaphysics". White's first criticism of Glanvill is that he fails to acknowledge the dependence of physics on "metaphysics"; and the question is, what exactly does he mean by metaphysics?

He appears to mean something closely akin to what Aristotle, too, called "metaphysics", what Plato before him called "dialectic" (the study, not the method¹⁵), what we today would probably call "meta-science", or "philosophy of science", or "logic of science".

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 75 (my emphases).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.

¹⁵ See Dorothea Krook, *Three Traditions of Moral Thought*, Appendix B: "Two Meanings of Dialectic", pp. 328–332.

Metaphysics, says White, is “content with few Experiments, surprises Truth by vertue of Demonstration, and fixes it by that force which alone is inerrable, viz. the power of our Spiritual Intellect”. Significantly, it “advances in growth by reflecting on itself its inmost eye”. Physics, *per contra*, is “more abundant in Experiments, and meer Historicall almost, unless assisted and forc’d into Rules by this its Companion”. Indeed, “without her [metaphysics’] help and Principles borrowed from her”, physics “is able scarce to demonstrate any thing and advance by Causes connectedly”.¹⁶ What he means by the striking observation that physics by itself is “meer Historicall almost” is, presumably, that it is “almost” a mere record or chronology of observed fact, yielding no insight into the necessary causal connections of natural phenomena, and thus no knowledge of the “laws” of nature. Only metaphysics can “help” physics to become a genuine science or body of knowledge. And why? Because it is self-reflective (“reflecting on itself its inmost eye”): meaning, that it constantly examines and criticises its own categories, concepts, assumptions, postulates, theories, and hypotheses; and it also articulates the *rules* by which this self-examination is conducted. Physics, along with all the other special sciences, has by its nature no such self-reflective power. Consequently, it is “dependent” on metaphysics for the definition of its categories, concepts, postulates, etc., *and* for its method of proving—analytically, demonstratively, like geometry—its theories and hypotheses. If this is the relation between White’s physics and metaphysics, it does suggest that his metaphysics is a kind of science of sciences, a supreme meta-science, transcending in the *generality* of its vision and scope physics and all the special sciences; and, by this very generality, exercising the power of overseeing and guiding, as it were, the activities of the special sciences.

Or, if White’s metaphysics is viewed as, specifically, “logic of science”, its functions would be something like the following: to determine the scope and limits of physics as distinct from those of other sciences; to define the special character of its postulates (axioms, assumptions, first principles) setting it apart from other sciences; to provide the methods or “rules” by which the postulates may be critically examined and re-examined; to define what *kind* of knowledge physics offers, and the kind and degree of certainty of that knowledge. In either case, White’s metaphysics would be remarkably close to Plato’s science of sciences, “dialectic”; show-

¹⁶ *Exclusion*, Preface to the Reader.

ing again the way in which Platonic doctrines infiltrate White's essential Aristotelianism.

2. CONTROVERSY-LOGICKE

"Few [are] able to sustain the éclat of discourse evidently and rigorously connected", remarks White at the opening of *The Middle State of Souls*;¹⁷ and in Rushworth's *Dialogues*, the fictitious Nephew suggests how this deficiency in the contemporary practice of controversy may be remedied:

I think indeed there's a great difference between disputing wildly to and fro with arguments on both sides, which most men use, and taking known and agreed principles and proceeding upon them to draw forth a long thread of science, as methinks your manner is . . .¹⁸

With a general definition of the correct method of controversy thus laid down, White goes on to indicate how it will operate in detail, in a passage in which he proclaims in effect both the thesis and the method of his life's endeavour in controversy: he will repeatedly prove the infallibility of oral tradition as the "rule of faith" for all Christians, and will indefatigably insist that this can be proved only by the method he advocates. In this passage, he recommends Rushworth's *Dialogues* as a model of method in controversy on the following grounds:

The *Dialogues* . . . govern their discourse by this fair method: First, they treat and settle their definitions. Tradition we call, the delivery of Christ's doctrine from hand to hand, in that part of the world which, with propriety, is call'd Christian. By Christ's doctrine, we mean that which was generally preach'd by the Apostles, and contains all such points as are necessary to the salvation of the World; not only in particular, to single persons, but for government of the Church, and bringing multitudes with Convenience to perfection in this life and felicity in the next. Which being establish'd, they immediately proceed to this general Position, that All Christ taught, or the Holy Ghost suggested to the Apostles, of this nature, is, by direct and uninterrupted line, entirely and fully descended to the present Church, which communicates with, and acknowledges subjection to the Roman. Adding also the converse of that proposition, viz. Nothing is so descended but such Truths; nor anything

¹⁷ Thomas White, *The Middle State of Souls* (London, 1659), p. 2.

¹⁸ William Rushworth, *Dialogues or, The Judgement of Common Sense in the Choice of Religion* (Paris, 1640), p. 88. [The authorship of this work has long been disputed: in fact, it seems that White himself is responsible only for some additions to the second (1654) edition: see B.C. Southgate, "A Note on the Authorship of Rushworth's *Dialogues*", *Notes & Queries*, NS xxviii (1981), 207–208.]

held by this tenure but what is so descended; which being cast up, amounts to this great Conclusion, No error was ever or can be embraced by the Church, in quality of a matter of faith.¹⁹

The secret of the method is plain enough. It is to make the primary definitions of an argument or sequence of arguments so *inclusive* that—as in the paradigm of sciences, geometry—they contain everything one wants to draw out of them “by necessary consequence”. It is a secret particularly cherished by the rationalist mind. Hobbes, for example, makes impressive use of it at the opening of Chapter XIV of *Leviathan*, where he lays down the cycle of definitions that implicitly contains his whole civil philosophy—a *tour de force* that would have been commended by his friend Thomas White and doubtless strengthened the bond that enabled them successfully to wrangle and squabble about other things. And John Sergeant memorably defined the secret in his own distinctive idiom when he announced for all the world to hear, that “it is the praise of an inference to be contained in the antecedent”.

So White and Sergeant invariably argue “from the definition”, having first made their definitions contain all that they wish to draw out of them. Here is a typical instance. If the Protestant adversary asks on what grounds the Catholic declares a Church Council to be infallible, White answers as follows: A Council is a Council only as it proceeds *conciliariter*; to proceed “conciliariter” means “to attend to tradition”; “tradition” means “what was delivered”; and “what was delivered” is the gospel of Christ. Thus a Council *as it is a Council* “attends to tradition”, i.e. perpetuates “what was delivered”, which is the gospel of Christ; therefore, the Council as it is a Council is infallible.²⁰

If we grant White his theory of knowledge or “science”, the argument appears to be unanswerable. For if an argument is a system of inferences, and if “it is the praise of an inference to be contained in the antecedent”, a genuine (i.e. necessary) inference must be an integral part of the *meaning* of the definition from which it is drawn. In other words, an argument is a series of identical propositions that systematically draw out the full meaning of the premises or primary definitions; indeed “to argue” means “to draw out the full meaning of the premises or primary definitions”. This is why White puts such emphasis on the question of definition in the true “method of science”—and sounds like a Hobbesian nominalist when he does it:

¹⁹ Thomas White, *An Apology for Rushworth's Dialogues* (Paris, 1654), pp. 7–8.

²⁰ *Religion and Reason*, p. 123.

'Tis plain that to ask a Definition is *nothing but asking what they mean who understandingly use a word.*

... Whoever aspires to Science must be assiduous . . . above all in the practice of Defining; for *all the Connection of Notions is found in Definitions, and the connection of Terms is that which makes Science.*²¹

So the White-Sergeant "controversy-logicke" demands explicit and exact definition, and absolute rigour in drawing out the consequences of those definitions; and the method appears to work admirably, mainly because of their mastery of the art, which in every dispute gives them the advantage over their less practised adversaries. Yet they would not be the true Aristotelians they are if they did not recognise that no argument, consequential or not, is possible if assent to the definitions is refused. Accordingly, they are obliged to ask, in Aristotle's phrase: How can we "secure our premises"? On what grounds can we command the assent of our adversaries to our primary definitions, and thus to the necessary consequences of those definitions?

The answer implicit in their controversial practice gets straight to the heart of the matter. They appeal in effect to two basic doctrinal positions: first, to the theory of human nature that, as Christians, they hold in common with their adversaries; and, second, to a theory of knowledge or "science" they believe to be so indisputably true that it cannot but command the assent of all rational men, whether Christian or not. This is the postulated common ground on which they frame their definitions; and their procedure is thus broadly "dialectical", not "didactical", in Aristotle's (and Plato's) sense.²² Thus, in his key argument for "oral tradition" as the only infallible rule of faith for Christians, White invokes both the analysis of human motives that the Protestant adversary *as a Christian* must agree to be a true analysis; and, in addition, the analysis of the kinds and degrees of evidence and the kinds and degrees of assent that the adversary *as a rational man* must agree to be a true account of the operations of the human understanding.

This is how he "secures the premises" of his argument for oral tradition, which in bare outline is as follows:

The infallible certainty of what is delivered by "oral tradition" depends ultimately on the absolute reliability—i.e. the absolute veracity and absolute inerrability—of the accredited witnesses (the authors of the Synoptic Gospels). Whether that veracity and inerrability are or are not in fact absolute can be determined only by

²¹ *Peripateticall Institutions*, pp. 21, 25 (my emphasis).

²² See ch. 2 above.

an appraisal of the "motives" that would oblige a man *in this situation* to be absolutely reliable. But "this situation" happens to be one in which the motives to absolute veracity are incomparably the strongest, most compelling, most irresistible. For it is the eternal salvation of each witness that is at stake; and not only his, but the salvation of all the generations unborn. Would a father *lie* to his son (White and Sergeant ask repeatedly) in a matter of such supreme moment?—and when it is *known* what the consequences of "lying" will be, for father and son alike? The supposition is obviously absurd; therefore the fact is impossible; therefore the "motives" to absolute veracity are in fact absolutely binding; therefore the first witnesses were absolutely reliable. Since these motives would be no less binding upon the second, the third, the fourth, to the *n*th generation, the unbroken continuity of the oral tradition of the Catholic Church is established; and consequently also, its claim to be the sole repository of "all Christ taught, or the Holy Ghost suggested to the Apostles"—in other words, to be the only "rule of faith" for Christians.²³

This part of the argument is obviously grounded in a theory of human nature: what the "motives" of men *must* be in certain situations, and how therefore they may be expected to behave in those situations. It is also clear that the basic postulates of this theory of human nature (basic, at any rate, in this argument), that the salvation of his soul *must* be of supreme moment to every man, is accepted as indisputably true by the Protestant and the Catholic Christian alike. The argument is thus "dialectically" sound.

The premises are still further secured by appeal to a theory of knowledge which, it is claimed, no rational man can refuse. So the argument runs:—

What is immediately given in sense-experience, i.e. what we hear and see, is infallibly persuasive, in a way knowledge by ratiocination (i.e. what we know mediately, "by interpretation"), can never be. Consequently, a rule of faith which, like oral tradition, relies on the transmission of Christ's gospel by the senses—what the first witnesses saw and heard being transmitted by word of mouth to the second generation, and so on, to the present day—cannot fail to be commensurably more certain than a rule of faith which, like Scripture, relies on the transmission of mere "interpretations". This is the safeguard against error that the oral tradition of the Catholic Church uniquely enjoys: the senses cannot deceive, therefore what the first witnesses heard and saw could not be false. Add to this the motives to absolute veracity, derived from the basic postulate of the Christian theory of man, as an absolute safeguard against

²³ The best statements of this argument occur in Rushworth, *Dialogues*, pp. 493–494, 580–582, 432–435, 439–442, 463–469, 472–475, 490–499, 536–539, 554–556.

"deception"—and the infallibility of oral tradition is incontrovertibly established.²⁴

The flaws in the argument are obvious. The most glaring perhaps is the extraordinary contention that the senses cannot deceive; and this White's and Sergeant's Anglican adversaries are quick enough to seize on and expose. But, unaccountably, they fail to make a subtler and more damaging criticism. For they might surely have added that it is not of course a matter of *lying*—i.e. of deliberate deception: no one supposes the first witnesses would have deliberately lied about what they witnessed or thought they witnessed. But it surely could be a matter of *self-deception*—self-deception viewed not merely as a minor human frailty, but as one of the ineradicable corruptions of our fallen state.

The "dialectical" merits of this counter-argument are plain. It can be presented as a necessary consequence of the Christian theory of man which the Catholics, *in common with their Anglican adversaries*, accept as indisputably true. If White and Sergeant concede, as they do, the truth of this theory of man, they must, in the name of the consequentiality they tirelessly extol, concede also every necessary consequence of that theory. And one of the necessary consequences of the doctrine of the Fall, which is the heart of the Christian theory of man, is that men are incurably disposed not merely to "error" and "lying", but to that last infirmity of superior spirits, the sin of self-deception. This response, however, seems not to have occurred to the Anglican bishops. Tillotson, Stillingfleet, and the others repeatedly challenge claims about the inerrability of the senses and the impossibility of "lying" by the first witnesses; but their denials are always made on merely "natural" grounds, never on the ground of the Biblical account of human nature that it was fully in their power to invoke. The impartial observer cannot help feeling disappointed, and even somewhat exasperated, to see the chance for such a decisive little victory thrown away.

Whatever the shortcomings of the argument may be, the conscious logical rigour with which it is developed is typical of the method of controversy-logicke promulgated and practised by

²⁴ White's expositions of this part of the argument are sketchy, and it is in Sergeant's works that the position is fully worked out. See Rushworth, *Dialogues*, pp. 580–582; White, *Controversy-Logicke*, pp. 127–128; and Sergeant, *Schism Dispatch't*, pp. 118–124, 96–101; *Sure-footing in Christianity*, pp. 46–55, 83–84, 105–106, 109–111; "Animadversions" (appended to the 2nd edition of *Sure-footing*), pp. 218–224; *Reason against Raillery*, pp. 121–123; *Error non-plust*, pp. 188–190, 231; "Method to arrive at Satisfaction in Religion" (appended to *Error non-plust*), pp. 251f.; *First Catholick Letter*, pp. 31–34; *Second Catholick Letter*, pp. 56–63.

White and Sergeant. "Scientific" method, in controversy as in every form of human discourse, consists in laying down definitions and drawing out the full meaning of these definitions. To do this is to argue by "necessary connexion of terms" and thus to create "a long thread of science". This is "science" viewed (as in the *Posterior Analytics*) as proof or demonstration; and it is essentially "didactical" in character. However, when the question is asked, "How came the master by his definitions?", the answer cannot be given within the framework of didactical demonstration. The master is obliged to abandon didactics for dialectics, and appeal to a *shared* theory of human nature and theory of knowledge ("science") for assent to the primary definitions. When the definitions (premises) have been secured by the assent of the adversary, and only *if* they have been thus secured, can argument "from the definition" proceed according to the hallowed Peripatetic "rules of art".

Though White and Sergeant are fully conscious of the didactics of their argument for oral tradition as the one Christian rule of faith, and are also conscious of the logical priority of the theory of human nature and theory of knowledge from which they derive their primary definitions or premises, they appear to be unconscious of the dialectical dimension of the argument. This is obscured for them, one may surmise, for two main reasons: because they themselves believe their dialectically-established premises to be absolutely true—not merely, as Aristotle had insisted, "commonly accepted" as true; and because the nature of their enterprise, that they have a revealed faith to promulgate, induces them to speak as if they were laying down definitions when in fact they are appealing for assent to (Christian) opinions commonly accepted. Thus they say in effect, "No sane man can suppose that a father could lie to his son in a matter of such supreme gravity as their common salvation"; but they *mean*, "No father *could* lie to his son—*could he?*—in a matter of such supreme gravity . . ." The second is the true dialectical form of their argument, the first is that dialectical argument in didactical disguise. One only has to compare this way of "securing the premises", by the assent of the adversary, with their genuinely didactical way of laying down definitions on the basis of the "necessary connexion of terms" (for example, the definitions of "tradition", "a Council", "a Father", "a rule of faith"), to be assured that the difference is real and important.

Yet, though they appear to be unconscious of, or at least fail to acknowledge, the dialectical nature of some of the most crucial

premises of their argument, they do implicitly recognise that definitions dialectically dependent on the assent of the adversary, and arguments derived from such definitions, cannot be apodeictically true, and are therefore less secure than is "the long thread of science" derived from definitions laid down in the didactical mode. It may well be this sense of the relative insecurity of their dialectical premises and arguments that leads them to introduce a fresh criterion of truth totally different from their criterion of demonstrative or "scientific" truth.

This fresh criterion is, unexpectedly, surprisingly, the visible *behaviour* of men, which, according to White and Sergeant, can transform opinion into knowledge or truth. If, they contend, "an opinion commonly accepted" can be shown to have the power of obliging men to behave consistently in accordance with it, that opinion thereby acquires the truth value of any scientific truth established by necessary connexion of terms. This is again Plato's doctrine of true opinion, but with the non-Platonic rider that true opinion is knowledge or truth, so long as it continues to direct men to right behaviour. And it is the more Greek and the less Christian in deliberately dissociating the visible behaviour of men from the invisible guidance of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, thus turning it into a thoroughly positivist criterion of truth. This positivist element in the thought of Thomas White, which John Sergeant inherited, is unusual enough to merit closer attention.

3. BLACKLO'S HERESIES: POSITIVISM AND FIDEISM

The charges of heresy directed against Thomas White and his Blackloism were political or quasi-political even more than they were theological. In the historic conflict between Seculars and Regulars starting in the 1590s and continuing all through the seventeenth century, White was an outspoken supporter and intellectual leader of the Secular cause. As the Regulars were in practice the Jesuits, this earned him the enmity of the Jesuit party—a dangerous body to run foul of. He was thought to be tainted with Gallicanism, expressed at the time in a questioning or outright denial of the famous deposing power of the Pope; and this would not have made him popular with the Vatican. He was also, it seems, ambiguous or tepid in his opposition to the taking of the Oath of Allegiance, which would have further alienated the Roman Curia, as well as the Catholic recusants at home. And his explicit advocacy in *The Grounds of Obedience and Government* (1655), of submission to the ruling power of the state, whether Catholic or heretic, whether King or Parliament, was

deplored and rejected by the Jesuits and again, of course, by Rome.²⁵

The political charges against White were closely related to his theology; and one charge explicitly brought against him was that he “evacuated faith by demonstration”. I want to suggest that what evacuation there was took two main forms. One was a fairly clear fideism, the other a more elusive positivism. In the latter, a Hobbesian (and Aristotelian) logical nominalism mingled with a metaphysical reductionism that tended to affirm the sole reality of outward, visible acts or “practice”, while virtually denying the reality of the inward, invisible states of mind and spirit by which the faith of historic Christianity subsists. I have called it “positivism” with a double intention: in order to bring out its logical-epistemological basis in White’s thought (its preoccupation with criteria of verification, methods of demonstration, what counts and what does not count as evidence, and so forth); and also in order to suggest that it anticipates in subtle ways the positivism of the great irreligious thinkers of the eighteenth century and after—Hume, Bentham, Comte, and their twentieth-century successors.

There is a notorious absence of agreement among the doctors of the Roman Catholic Church about the number of divines whose consensus of opinion is required to establish a “new” doctrine as a point of faith. How, then, asks a Protestant adversary of Thomas White, do you know when the Church has “defined” a point of faith? White replies:

In the practice of sixteen ages it has no more been doubted when the Church has defined than when Parliament had enacted. Why then is there required more information? Some divines say more, some less be enough. Let them be doing in the Schools as long as the practice goes on sufficiently for the Church’s government.²⁶

This is a clear case of making “practice”, together with what White called “public assent”, a sufficient criterion of truth—and in a matter of such gravity as the defining of a point of faith. Similarly, on the nature of religion itself, a matter of at least equal gravity, White’s emphasis again is on the practice: religion, he asserts, is not “the virtue so named by Divines”, but “the skill of attaining to eternal blisse”.²⁷ The acquisition of a “skill” or “art”

²⁵ [Dorothea Krook had planned to consider these political matters in another book. For some treatment, see B.C. Southgate, *Covetous of Truth*, esp. chs. 6, 7.]

²⁶ *Apology for Rushworth*, pp. 109–110.

²⁷ *Controversy-Logicke*, p. 25.

is predominantly a matter of practice; therefore, the acquisition of religion, like the acquisition of moral excellence in Aristotle's account of the moral life in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is effected by practice or habituation. Train your children "in Godliness as perfectly as in natural qualities", White exhorts, "without any violent straining of them thereunto", and it is certain they will not fail in later years "to gaine stronger grounds and maxims to confirme what they first accepted of in a more simple manner"; and he presses the parallel with the pagans' "rule of life":

... What in Christian language we call religion, is correspondent to that which the heathen wizards termed Moral Philosophy.

... Religion is in proportion to Christian life what they [the pagans] did esteem Moral Philosophy to be towards a good or happy life in nature.²⁸

White has already made a point of stressing, and in this too he is followed by Sergeant, that "controvertists" are obliged to exclude revelation as a legitimate means of securing their premises. Indeed he makes it a part of the very definition of "controversy" that it shall establish its affirmations (for example, the infallible certainty of oral tradition as the Christian rule of faith) on "human testimony" alone—that is, by proofs drawn exclusively from natural reason.²⁹ Yet even a Catholic who grants this Whitean doctrine may be disconcerted by his emphasis on the bare "naturalness" of religion; and, still more perhaps, by the Hobbesian nominalism lurking in the suggestion that religion is only another *name* for natural morality: "what in Christian language we call religion".

He may be similarly taken aback by White's positivist interpretation of the Catholic doctrine of visible works, brought out with great force in his account of what it *means* to be damned for disobedience of God's commands. "Since the end of our faith and knowledge", he remarks, "is the observing in fact and not only in will the commandments of God, with the loss of bliss and incurring eternal damnation if it be not done in effect", therefore a man is damned, "not because he did not obey the command, but because he did not the action, nor followed the way necessary to salvation. [For] it is in virtue of doing the action that the fulfilling of the command saveth all those whom it doth save; and without it, none are saved".³⁰

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24, 18–19.

²⁹ See Thomas White, *Devotion and Reason* (Paris, 1661), pp. 60–61; and Sergeant, *Third Catholick Letter*, pp. 22–26; *Fourth Catholick Letter*, pp. 28–29; *Fifth Catholick Letter*, pp. 64–66.

³⁰ *Controversy-Logicke*, pp. 34, 32.

This, of course, is perfectly consistent with the Catholic view of the sacraments, that chief bone of contention between Catholics and Protestants from the outset of the Reformation. Yet, again, it is one thing to say what the orthodox Catholic doctrine says, that a man is saved by his participation in the sacrament, irrespective of the “merits” of the priest who administers it, because by the act of participation he becomes receptive to the internal operations of the Holy Spirit. It is quite another thing to say, as White does, that the sin consists in the simple failure to perform the action, and *not*, he explicitly insists, in the “internal state” of disobedience.

In another passage in *Controversy-Logicke*, White supports this argument by homely parallels, which are intended to emphasise (perhaps to the point of distortion) that mere moral qualities are ultimately irrelevant to our eternal salvation; for to be well-meaning can never compensate for being wrong:

If what we have hitherto laboured to evince be true; namely, that God's commands are not meer voluntary ones; but if such actions as do naturally breed the effect for which they are commanded; then labour as much as you will, if you do not that which is commanded, that is, if you take not the true way of going to heaven, you shall never come there. The prescriptions of the Doctour to the Apothecary are commands: but if the Apothecary (though he endeavour never so much) do not mingle the right drugges, and temper them according to the Doctours prescriptions, the Physick will not prove healthful to the Patient. The husbandman's prescriptions to his kynde are commands; yet if his servant (though he work by his greatest wittes) shall sow peace [peas] instead of wheat, the crop will not come up fit for the Masters table! So in all other trades and arts: it is not enough to do our endeavour, but the things themselves must be really performed; or else the desired effects will not follow. Then assuredly those who content themselves with this cold comfort, that God is merciful, do make less account of that so important business of their salvation than they do of those meaner profits which arise out of vulgar arts and occupations.³¹

To designate God's mercy as “cold comfort” is typical of what Matthew Arnold would have called White's Jacobin spirit. He doesn't mind riding rough-shod over Christian sensibilities to assert a point that is rationally, logically, “scientifically” right; and this inexorable rationalism must also have had something to do with the suspicion and hostility he aroused in the Catholic Establishment.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the Jacobin limitations of

³¹ *Controversy-Logicke*, pp. 29–30

White's positivism, it makes a brilliant show in his treatment of the great burning issue between Catholics and Protestants, turning on the Protestant claim that Scripture is the final rule of faith for all Christians. White, of course, repudiates this claim; and his argument brings him closer than ever to his friend and adversary Thomas Hobbes. In this instance, significantly, the link is not only with the Hobbesian nominalist epistemology but, even more, with the doctrine of the absolute sovereign of *Leviathan*, whose absolute authority is defined ultimately by the power vested in him to be the sole legitimate *interpreter* of right and wrong, good and bad, true and false, in every dispute that threatens the peace of the commonwealth.

White's argument to prove the disqualification of Scripture to be the Christian rule of faith centres on one key point: that we possess no rules for interpreting it, and that in the absence of rules of interpretation, Scripture is no more than "a mute, ambiguous, dead writing". To quicken into life those black marks on paper, it is necessary that rules of interpretation should be laid down by an authority whose claims to the office of supreme interpreter cannot be disputed: in other words, by the oral tradition of the Catholic Church animated by "the heat and zeal still preserv'd alive in [its] bowles from the great fire of Pentecost". This, the living voice of Christ himself, is the only authoritative guide to the interpretation of the Scriptures, and therefore is itself the true rule of faith.³² The special interest of White's argument is in his persistent emphasis on the *logical* difficulties of the Protestant claim for Scripture as the rule of faith. Typically, he conducts the argument "controversially". If in a specific doctrinal dispute, X cites one "place" from Scripture in support of his position, Y another in support of his, how shall we settle the dispute? How, following the true "method to science", shall we *demonstrate* that X is wrong, Y right, or *vice-versa*? This, in White's favourite phrase, is "the state of the question". Now, White argues, to use Scripture for settling such controversies, "requireth divers suppositions whereupon both sides are to be agreed": for instance, "what texts are to prevail, what commentaries, or explications shall be allowed of, what is a proper [i.e. literal] and improper [i.e. metaphorical] speech, amongst improper speeches which must be preferred, what copies of every text shall be held for good, what conjectures shall be accounted against the natural

³² *Apology for Rushworth*, p. 149.

sense". Given common agreement about these points—"which", White justly observes, "I fear will be somewhat hard"—the disputants may then bring forward their respective "places" in support of the point at issue. The question is now to decide "the qualifications of the places"—that is, which of the two in fact supplies the "more apparent and likely" proof or confirmation. And to decide *this*, White declares triumphantly,

so many logical principles are first to be resolved . . . that all the lockicks hitherto invented would not afford sufficient light and instruction to make an evident conclusion [which] side were more apparent in words and texts.

Consequently,

. . . You may guess how far these disputations out of scripture are from clearing doubts, [and] what little good come of them unless they be well governed [i.e. controlled by rigorous rules of interpretation]; and therefore how for the most part the best credit or the best tongue carrieth away the day by the Auditor's prejudicate opinion or weakness.³³

So to the conclusion: that the Scriptures could not have been given to us by God to be our rule of faith, or to settle controversies. If this had been God's intention, he would in His infinite goodness and mercy, especially in a matter of such supreme importance, also have supplied *in Scripture itself* explicit rules of interpretation, by which the black marks on paper might without ambiguity be made to declare His will. In the absence of such rules, we have no access to His will in the Scriptures; therefore, the Scriptures cannot have been intended to be the rule of faith for Christians.

To say this, however, is not to deny that God's will is *contained in Scripture*. This is explicitly, and therefore indisputably, declared in Scripture itself; and it is confirmed by the "living voice" of the tradition of the Catholic Church—notably, by that ruling of the Council of Trent which prescribes that both Holy Scripture and the oral tradition of the Church shall be recognised "with an equal feeling of piety and reverence" as authoritative sources of doctrine. But, White argues, Christian doctrine is contained in Scripture "in gross, as it were"; its vital details, on which depends the salvation of Christians, are inaccessible for lack of rules of interpretation; therefore, again, Scripture cannot be the rule of faith; and this is all he wishes to establish.

To establish this, moreover, does not deprive the Scriptures of their genuine, noble, and most important function—that of

³³ Rushworth, *Dialogues*, pp. 350–352.

promoting true Christian living. White quotes St. Paul: "All Scripture is inspired from God, and profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice (*that is, good life*) that the man of God may become perfect, being furnished to every good work". This supports the Church's view of the Scriptures as "highly profitable for the enablement of Preachers to teach, reprove, confirm in all points of Catholick doctrine, both concerning Speculation and Practice". Characteristically, he goes further than the orthodox Catholic in a reductive positivist direction, when he adds that Scripture is to be regarded as one "holy instrument" among others, such as chalices, consecrated oils, and so forth.³⁴ But he remains firmly Catholic in his main contention, that Scripture can be interpreted only by "the law written in the heart of the Church", meaning, oral tradition.

The problems of Scriptural interpretation had a commanding place among the intellectual problems that engaged thinking minds throughout the seventeenth century. It exercised philosophical theologians from Hooker in the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* at the end of the sixteenth century, to Locke in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* at the end of the seventeenth; and it could not be avoided even by Hobbes, who in *Leviathan*, Part III, proposes his extraordinary re-interpretations of the Scriptures with a full consciousness of the logical necessity for undertaking the task. In a passage that appears to have been overlooked, or perhaps not understood, by those of his Christian contemporaries who regarded "Of a Christian Commonwealth" as a perfectly arbitrary piece of diabolism, Hobbes writes: "That which may perhaps most offend, are certain texts of Holy Scripture, alleged by me to other purpose than ordinarily they use to be by others. But I have done it with due submission, *and also, in order to my subject, necessarily*; for they are the outworks of the enemy, from whence they impugn the civil power".³⁵

Thus, paradoxically, Thomas White, a Catholic priest and theologian, and Thomas Hobbes, a potentially atheistic political scientist, have a common interest in the problems of Scriptural interpretation. That it should be mainly its logical problems that preoccupy them both is to be traced back, again, to the common ground of their rationalist conception of knowledge. Hobbes in *Leviathan* is intent on creating a civil philosophy that, for the first

³⁴ *Apology for Rushworth*, pp. 157 (White's emphasis), 140: *Controversy-Logicke*, p. 207.

³⁵ *Leviathan*, Epistle Dedicatory.

time in the history of that study, shall be as rigorously demonstrative as a system of geometry and thus a genuine "science". White aims at a similar demonstrative rigour in his exposition of the principles of controversy in his *Controversy-Logicke*. The difference is, of course, that White exercises his logical gifts on the Scriptural problem for the sake of re-affirming the Catholic rule of faith, while Hobbes exercises his in the interests of a secular sovereign power that can tolerate no divinely-sanctioned rival within the commonwealth. Nevertheless, the common ground of their rationalist epistemology is a firm bond; and it provides sufficient unity in difference to invite the conjecture that the logic of Scriptural interpretation may have been another subject of their animated exchanges at Westminster described by Anthony à Wood.

Blakloanae Haeresis accuses White of Manichaeism, of which in its classical form I have been able to find no sign in his works. I have therefore surmised that what they may be referring to is the pronounced fideist strain in his thinking, creating a "dual theology"—the separation of the realm of faith from the realm of reason and "science"—that might well elicit the broad, loose term "Manichean" for lack of the more precise modern term. Though the name was unknown, fideism was in fact a prevailing heresy in that "age so philosophical"—the age predominantly of Montaigne, Pascal, and Descartes, rather than that of Hooker and the Cambridge Platonists. In White's writings there is much direct evidence of a thoroughgoing fideism; and some circumstantial evidence, such as his association with the Mersenne circle in Paris in the 1640s, to give further credence to the fideist hypothesis.

Responding to the charge that he "evacuated faith by demonstration", White defends himself, piously enough, by claiming that the aim of all his endeavours has been to show "the conformity of Faith with inferior Sciences". He reminds his critics that "in the Church will ever march together Science and Faith, though in divers measures"; and, while acknowledging the limitations of reason in dealing with the mysteries of the Christian faith, he insists that it is nevertheless the greater part of what St. Paul called our reasonable service to God to exercise reason in an attempt to discover "rational explications" of the mysteries. Thus, "If you say Reason could never have reach't these mysteries, I freely assent; but that after Revelation it cannot be satisfy'd, I unwillingly believe till it be prov'd". And, in a less conciliatory mood:

Was there ever *Divine* whose very Profession ingaged him not in disputes of *Divinity*? Is there any university in the world wherein such questions are not treated? What else do Schoolmen propose to themselves but the discussing and clearing against Infidels and Hereticks the mysteries of our *Faith* by Principles of *Nature* and *Philosophy*, and the illustrating that obscurity which overshadows them, by the light and conformity of *Reason*, to the unspeakable comfort of the Faithful? How then comes that to be unlawful for me which in all others is not only allow'd, but highly commended.³⁶

The argument seems unanswerable; but it is not wholly free of disingenuousness. For it is one thing to seek "rational explanations" of the Christian mysteries that are consistent with the Church's teaching: it is another thing, particularly in a Catholic priest, to *oppose* by the exercise of reason the received opinion of the Church in these matters. Accordingly, it is perhaps not surprising that White's avowed submission to the Holy Mother Church should have been called in question when, for example, he denies that God created man's soul because, he contends, the distinction between body and soul in the act of divine creation is a "notional", not a real, distinction; and when he defends his right to correct received opinion, on the ground that "I'm accustomed to distinguish between what's due to the sincerity of Faith, and what to Scholastical subtilty"³⁷—a statement carrying a strong whiff of fideism, that his enemies would not have missed. Still less are they likely to have missed it in his reply to a scholastic conundrum turning on the question "whether sinful acts are perfections, since the soul is more perfect when she is deprived of them". White's comment is revealing:

In create[d] perfections, many times a *greater puts out the lesser*, as *Science puts out Faith*, Comprehension Hope, Innocence Repentance, &c.; so doth the perfection of a vertuous act displace the imperfecter perfection which is in a bad action.³⁸

Throughout his writings there is also an insistent emphasis on the difference between faith as understood by the "fools", and as understood by the "reflecters". This too his critics evidently regarded as anti-Christian in spirit, for it is specifically mentioned in *Blackloanae Haeresis* in the charge-sheet of Blacklo's heretical or near-heretical deviations. White vigorously defends his right—indeed his duty—to observe the distinction, and pours scorn on the detractors who charge him with heresy for it:

³⁶ Thomas White, *A Letter to a Person of Honour* (Douai, 1659), pp xiv, viii-ix; *Religion and Reason*, pp. 115, 113.

³⁷ *Exclusion*, pp. 31-32.

³⁸ *Religion and Reason*, p. 132.

How ridiculous is it that what apprehensions we made of our Creed when we were Children, the same we should retain when we are men. Or what Conceptions clowns frame to themselves in Religion, Philosophers and Divines should be obliged not to transcend, under pain of being esteem'd Supplanters of Christ and his Doctrine, Evacuators of Faith, Miscreants, and I know how many other such ill-favoured names as you give me too often up and down your Book.³⁹

It is a good answer so far as it goes, though it could scarcely be expected to conciliate the censors. Doesn't this haughty intellectualism, they might have said, "evacuate" Christ's gospel of Christian humility, Christian love, St. Paul's fellowship of the spirit, the equality of all Christians before God? And they would have had their objections reinforced by White's pronouncements on the ever-controversial subject of "visions" and "visionaries".

No public verification of visions is possible, says White; therefore we have to rely entirely on the testimony of the alleged visionary: "on his veracity, who sometimes is a Peasant, sometimes a Woman, or at best one little capable of judging what passeth within their own souls". The problem is essentially the same when the visionaries presumptive are "wise men and saintly men". They, it seems, are no better qualified to judge "what passeth within their own souls": for, White observes, "what miracle is it that a prudent man should be *once* deceived? And [as for] the pious man, it is so frequent that nobody wonders at it". The only criteria of a true vision that he finally allows are, significantly, conformity with "clear reason", or external confirmation by "special events" (i.e. miracles), whose authenticity is attested by evidence that cannot be attributed to mere "chance" (coincidence):

The Visions, then, which without forfeiture of prudence may be credited and rely'd on must be such as carry with them proofs beyond the reach of Phantasy. Such as are coherent and somewhat long discourses, a discovery of some such new truth as either carries with it its own evidence, built on the principles of clear reason, or is back'd with such special events that they transcend the sphere of chance.⁴⁰

To this he adds: "Not that I question but that an unlook'd for Demonstration, or an unexpected Verse or Poem, may peradventure by a dream or natural extasie be composed, which much study could not otherwise arrive to; but [what I do question is], that *when anything therein exceeds the reach of nature*, it is a stronger argument of a celestial origin".⁴¹ Reason and nature, the rational

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

⁴⁰ *Middle State*, pp. 168, 176.

and the naturalistic, are it seems the ultimate twin-standard for judging the validity of "visions". To what extent this "evacuates faith by demonstration" may be left an open question. What is beyond question is the resemblance White's account of the man of vision bears to that of Hobbes in *Leviathan* and elsewhere. This is Hobbes, the great evacuator of faith, giving his typically naturalistic, positivistic, behaviouristic account of "How God speaketh to men" at the opening of "Of a Christian Commonwealth":

To say that God hath spoken to him [a man] in the Holy Scripture, is not to say that God hath spoken to him immediately, but by mediation of the prophets, or of the apostles, or of the church, in such manner as he speaks to all other Christian men. To say he hath spoken to him in a dream, is no more than to say he dreamed that God spake to him; which is not of force to win belief from any man, that knows dreams are for the most part natural, and may proceed from former thoughts; and such dreams as that, from self-conceit and foolish arrogance, and false opinion of a man's own godliness, or other virtue, by which he thinks he hath merited the favour of extraordinary revelation. To say he hath seen a vision, or heard a voice, is to say, that he hath dreamed between sleeping and waking: for in such manner a man doth many times naturally take his dream for a vision, as not having well observed his own slumbering. To say he speaks by supernatural inspiration, is to say he finds an ardent desire to speak, or some strong opinion of himself, for which he can allege no natural and sufficient reason. So that though God Almighty can speak to a man by dreams, visions, voice, and inspiration; yet he obliges no man to believe he hath so done to him that pretends it; who, being a man, may err, and, which is more, may lie.⁴²

The Hobbesian copiousness, analytical precision, and aphoristic bite are absent in White, but the doctrine is substantially the same. Anything that "exceeds the reach of nature", says White carefully, is no "stronger argument of a celestial origin"; but he means, just like Hobbes, that it is "no argument". And there is much in the common derisiveness of their tone, in their indifference to received Christian beliefs, in their calm reductiveness, in intention and effect, to reinforce the doctrinal similarities.

One may reasonably surmise that those who brought the charges of heresy against White were more disturbed by the Hobbesian positivism of his rational—too rational—theology (which they call "Pelagianism", using the name of the nearest historic heresy). than by his fideism ("Manichaeism"). For there is still a difference between separating the things that are faith's from the things that

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁴² *Leviathan*, ch. 23; pp. 243–244.

are reason's, whether in the interests of faith, like Pascal, or in the interests of reason, like Francis Bacon; and denying the reality of the internal, invisible "states" of grace, redemption, sin, disobedience, vision and prophecy, in order to affirm as the sole reality the external and visible behaviour designated by those names. It is the difference between a heresy that places God's power above his all provident beneficence, and is by this led into error; and another that minimises out of existence the internal operations of the Holy Spirit, thereby subverting the central revelation of Christ's gospel. Hobbes and White lead straight to Hume; while Bacon and Pascal only lead back to Ockham.

CHAPTER FIVE

SERGEANT THE ARISTOTELIAN (I)

1. ARISTOTELIAN REALISM

'Tis granted by all Mankind hitherto (unless perhaps the Cartesians) that Truth is fundamentally the Conformity of our Judgment to the Nature of the Thing, and that it [truth] consists formally in the Connexion of Terms.¹

This is one concise statement among many, appearing in Sergeant's most mature treatise in philosophy, of the historic Aristotelian synthesis into which he had been inducted by Kenelm Digby and Thomas White. When he speaks of "the Conformity of our Judgment to the Nature of the Thing", he is affirming Aristotle's conceptualist realism in metaphysics and epistemology; while in the addendum about "the Connexion of Terms", he invokes Aristotelian logical nominalism to make the point that, logically ("formally") speaking, truth is a property of propositions—that is, a purely linguistic phenomenon, existing in the human mind as a subject-predicate ("identical") proposition, created by the rules of formation and transformation of the logic of language. The passage also hints ("unless perhaps a Cartesian") at the polemical situations in which Sergeant is to make the most effective use of this Aristotelian doctrine: in the confutation of the modern "ideism" in philosophy, exemplified by Descartes and Locke; and in the exposure of the "ideist" taint in the theology of the Anglican bishops.

In his handling of Aristotelian conceptualist realism in his controversial writings, Sergeant's hold on the central synthesis never falters. But his emphasis shifts constantly, falling now on the realism, now on the conceptualism, according to the polemical needs of the moment. Thus, for example, when he is dissociating himself from the naive realism of the Peripatetics of the schools, he puts all the emphasis on the conceptualism. *Of course*, he says impatiently, the abstractions in which we think, our "inadequate" notions, are creations of the human mind; and to hypostatise them as real existents—"species", "entities", or what-not—is to "reduce Science to Mysterious Nonsense and Unintelligible Cant".² In another passage on the same theme, he brackets

¹ *Method*, Preface.

² John Sergeant, *Solid Philosophy* (London, 1697), p. 313.

Epicurean atomists with the schoolmen, as purveyors of “unintelligible cant”, charging them with an arbitrariness in their theorising that proves them to be “no true philosophers”. A man who will claim —

that there are multitudes of little Entities brought in to serve a present turn when the Discourse is at a plunge; or Atomes pursuing and over-taking their fellows, and clinging together conveniently for this purpose, without giving a reason why and how they must do so (as is the manner of the Epicureans), or whatever other useful Expedient he supposes to carry on the Clock-work of his Scheme; such a man is no true Philosopher.³

However, when he takes issue with the “ideists”, Locke and Descartes, it is the realism of the Aristotelian position that he insists on. Their fatal error, Sergeant argues, is to reduce our ideas or conceptions to mere representations or “similitudes” of things: an error that is fatal because, in the absence of precise criteria for distinguishing between true and false “similitudes” (and they supply none), they can have no means of knowing when their “ideas” do and when they do not in fact “resemble” the thing. Consequently, they are obliged ultimately to predicate reality *only* of the contents of the mind (the “ideas” of “ideism”)—in other words, to adopt in effect a quasi-subjectivist, if not quasi-solipsist, position; and to do this, Sergeant contends, is to renounce philosophy itself.

Sergeant, of course, does not speak of subjectivism and solipsism, contenting himself with the received seventeenth-century term “scepticism”, in a sense that encompasses both. To this deadly scepticism, he contends, Aristotelian realism is the only corrective. For, he explains, while this realism concedes that the abstractions in which we think, our “inadequate” notions, are creations of the human mind, it also insists that they are particular ways of conceiving *the thing*. Our notions (conceptions, ideas) *are* “the thing”, viewed from this or that point of view, under this or that “considerability”; and this is the ground of our assurance that our conceptions put us in possession, not of any “fantastic” inventions of our own, but of the thing itself.

Here are two of Sergeant’s briefer affirmations of this basic Aristotelian doctrine of his system, taken from his attack on Cartesians in *Non Ultra*. He is as confident about his own Rule of Truth as he is disparaging about theirs:

Our doctrine which makes our Notions, Conceptions, or Simple Apprehensions to be the very Thing objectively in our Understand-

³ *Method*, p. 173.

ing seems very Abstruse to those [like the Cartesians] who guide themselves by Fancy, not by Connexion of Terms.

... This main Hinge of all the Cartesian Hypothesis ... persuades them to place the Ground of Truth within their own Minds and its Productions, and not in the Things themselves.⁴

And in this longer statement, he emphasises the divine source of the “things” that ensure the superior “stability” of his Rule of Truth, in contrast to the “unsteady foundation” of theirs:

Those Ideas of yours are confessedly Effects produced by a Second Cause, the Mind itself, and not the Immediate Work of the First Cause on which ... our Rule [of Truth] is built. Which gives ours an Infinite Advantage above yours as to the Stability of its Ground, ours having for its Solid Foundation the Ideas of the Divine Understanding, whence are unquestionably deriv'd, and by which are establish'd the Essence of Things, in which ours is Immediately Grounded: whereas your Ideas are held by your selves to be the Creatures or Productions of your own Mind, which ... is a Defective Agent of its own Nature; and therefore its Productions so Uncertain that it seems a most strange piece of Doctrine to build all the Certain Truth and Knowledge Mankind can possibly have on such an Unsteady Foundation.⁵

2. “CONSIDERABILITIES”

The Aristotelian conceptualist realism that is the groundwork of the “solid philosophy” Sergeant asserted against the “fancies” of the Cartesians and Locke, can scarcely be separated or discussed apart from the doctrine of “considerabilities”, which is an integral part of it. I recapitulate the key points of this original reading of Aristotle’s *Categories* transmitted to Sergeant by Digby and White.

On their reading, the doctrine of the *Categories* is, or implies, a systematic statement of the view that all human knowledge is necessarily and inescapably “modal”. There are many “modes” in which, or by which, we apprehend reality; each mode is a way of “conceiving the same thing diversely”; and each is a *complete* way of conceiving “the same thing”. To the human mind, the thing itself, the concrete individuum, is confused and indistinct. It becomes clear and distinct only when it is viewed under this or that “considerability”—in this or that “aspect”, from this or that “point of view”. This means that clearness and distinctness (i.e. intelligibility), can be attained only by abstraction from the concrete individuum, by viewing it under this or that considerability. But to abstract is to reduce: no abstraction of or from the

⁴ *Non Ultra*, pp. 6, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

individuum can be identical with it; every abstraction is by definition less than that of, or from, which it is an abstraction. Consequently, every modal view of the real, being an abstraction, is necessarily "inadequate", while being at the same time "clear and distinct"; each modal abstraction of or from the real forms a conceptual "world"; and human knowledge is an aggregation of conceptual worlds ("worlds of ideas"), each world being self-complete and self-coherent, and each, because it is an abstraction from the concrete totality, being simultaneously "clear and distinct" and "inadequate".

This is how Sergeant puts it in three of his shorter statements of the doctrine: —

The main Fundamental of all True Philosophy . . . [is] that all our Abstracted Conceptions (without which we cannot possibly Apprehend, nor consequently Discourse of any thing Distinctly and Clearly) are of the Things themselves consider'd according to such or such a Respect. This is the basis of all the Aristotelian Philosophy; however there be too Few that exactly attend or hold to it. All our Ideas, or Notions, which are Solid, and not Fantastick, are nothing but several Conceptions of the Thing; or which is the same (taking the word Conception for the Object and not for the Act of Conceiving) the Thing diversely conceiv'd. Hence all our Conceptions, or Notions, are Inadequate, especially if they be Distinct, and not Confused.

Philosophy [is] . . . the Exact Knowledge of Things, taking this last word in its largest sense, as it comprehends *Rem* and *Modum rei*.⁶

The doctrine is further illuminated by Sergeant's specific examples and applications. Physics, for instance, is characterised (to borrow the terminology of a modern post-Hegelian philosopher⁷) as the world seen *sub specie quantitatis*:

He that knows distinctly the Notion or Nature of Quantity knows the whole World, and each particular Body in it, as far as they are Quantitative.⁸

Again, on the physicist's concept of space:

Space can signify nothing but Body according to such a Mode called Space or Quantity.⁹

Similarly, the notion of "relation", which Locke regards as an "Idea" without an archetype in *rerum natura*, is for Sergeant "but the Thing Considered thus, or *in order to another Individuum*, which

⁶ John Sergeant, *Transnatural Philosophy or Metaphysics* (London, 1700), Preface; *Solid Philosophy*, pp. 302, 456.

⁷ Michael Oakeshott, in *Experience and its Modes* (Cambridge, 1933), Chap. IV: "Scientific Experience".

⁸ *Transnatural Philosophy*, p. 53.

⁹ *Solid Philosophy*, p. 55.

we call to be thus *Modified*, or conceived to be *according to such manner related*". And "matter" and "form" as attributes of substance are not separate *things*, but —

nothing but diverse Notions or Considerations of the Thing formally as it is a Thing. Wherefore to say a Body is compounded of Matter and Form is no more in Literal Truth, than to say that there can be no more Considerations of a Body, taken formally, as it is a Thing.¹⁰

Another, unexpected application is Sergeant's claim that even God may be viewed under different "considerabilities": as the "Author and Orderer of Nature", says Sergeant, God enjoys one "mode" of existence; as the Divine Omnipotence capable of doing all things, supernatural as well as natural, He enjoys another, distinct existence. But the "ideists" Locke and Descartes do not understand that difference; and this is why, contrary both to logic and to true piety, they bring in God "at every Hard Pinch, to act contrary to what the Natures of Things required . . . that is, they would needs make God, as he is the Author and Orderer of Nature, to work either Preternaturally or else Supernaturally; which is a plain Contradiction". It is "a plain contradiction", because God viewed under the category or considerability of Nature or the Natural, has been confused with God under the category or considerability of the Preternatural or Supernatural. This crucial point Sergeant generalises, to affirm that *all* logical contradiction has its source in a confusion of categories or "considerabilities". This is what logical contradiction *means*: an impossibility created by attributing to a thing properties under one aspect or considerability, that belong to it under another. And this is why logic "by distinguishing exactly our several Notions and Respects", is able "to give us light to know what is truly a Contradiction and what not".¹¹

Sergeant repeatedly invokes the doctrine of considerabilities in his disputes with the Anglican bishops, and in particular in his attacks on what he sees as their desperately confused principles of controversy. One of their cardinal failings as controversialists, Sergeant contends, is irrelevance; and irrelevance, like contradiction, is a direct consequence of a confusion of categories. Thus, in one of his replies to Stillingfleet, he insists on laying down a definition of "controversy", that proscribes at least two forms of irrelevance they are particularly prone to: the citing of authorities

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Epistle Dedicatory; *Transnatural Philosophy*, p. 356.

for settling disputes; and the invoking of the assistance of the Holy Spirit in deciding controverted points. Sergeant draws upon the doctrine of considerabilities to make his point. He carefully distinguishes between Christian faith as viewed respectively by “school-divines” and “controvertists”. “School Divines”, he declares, “discourse of Faith under another Notion or consideration than Controvertists”; and he goes on to explain that, while the effort of the school divine is directed to finding *explanations* of the mysteries of the Christian faith, the controvertist’s business is with the “*motives*” that must oblige men to perpetuate these mysteries (i.e. Christian teachings), in a “tradition” continuous without break from the time of the Gospel witnesses to the present day. In his own words:

A Controvertist [is] one who is to assert Faith, not by looking into the *Mysteries* of Faith and explaining them (this being the Office of a School-Divine) but into the *Motives* to it or Rule of Faith.¹²

And again:

We are writing *Controversy*, and consequently treating of *Faith* precisely according to a particular consideration belonging to it, which is, by what way ’tis with Absolute Certainty derivable From Christ.¹³

Accordingly, a “school-divine” may appeal to the testimony of the Holy Spirit as part of his argument; but a “controvertist” may appeal only to the “Objects or *things without us*, viz. the Nature of *Mankind* and the nature of the *Motives* laid to perpetuate Christ’s doctrine”. And since the word “faith” as Sergeant *qua* “controvertist” uses it, must “necessarily mean Faith as Controverted, or according to what is controverted between us”, it follows that to quote school-divines in controversy is irrelevant—“unless” (Sergeant scrupulously adds) “[it can be shown] that they stated the Question and treated of Faith under the same Considerations as we do in our Controversy”. For the same reason, he concludes, it is grossly irrelevant for a controvertist to invoke the internal operations of the Holy Spirit: for “we cannot put God’s Grace and our Internal Satisfaction into Syllogisms when we are disputing”.¹⁴

Another form of irrelevance in controversy that provokes Sergeant’s wrath, is his latitudinarian adversaries’ habit of invoking what they call “moral qualifications”, instead of offering “clear

¹² John Sergeant, *Faith Vindicated from Possibility of Falsehood* (Louvain, 1667), p. 169.

¹³ *Fifth Catholic Letter*, Preface.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12; *Fourth Catholic Letter*, p. 29.

arguments". Stillingfleet, for example, argues that a "sober enquirer" possessed of such moral qualifications as "humility of mind, purity of heart, prayer to God, and sincere endeavour to do God's will", will not fail to arrive at a true interpretation, and thus at certain knowledge, of Christ's saving doctrine contained in Scripture. Sergeant grants that these moral qualifications are desirable and even necessary, being "excellent means . . . to purge the Will from By-affections; and, by so doing, to leave the Understanding free to see the force of the Proof, and thence to infer the Truth of what's prov'd or shewn to our Reason". But what he will not countenance is Stillingfleet's claim that these moral qualifications are a *substitute* for the proof or demonstration itself. Speaking as a "controvertist", whose sole business is to prove or demonstrate the unassailable validity ("certainty") of his "rule of faith", Sergeant demands:

Where's this Proof, where's this Truth all the while? Must we produce such invisible things [moral qualifications] for open Proofs? [For] if all these Moral Qualifications be requisit . . . to make men Certain of Christ's Doctrine, he must prove that Himself and all his sober Enquirers, which are Members of this private-spirited Church, have all these Qualifications, e'er we or any man living can be certain they have true Faith.

And, with sharper scorn:

We are disputing as Controvertists, and demand open and intelligible Proofs; and he [Stillingfleet] sends us to Invisible holes which only God the searcher of hearts can find out . . . I expected he should produce clear Arguments *as became a Controvertist*, and he alledges the most hidden Means in the world as becomes an Enthusiast.¹⁵

Contradiction and irrelevance: these, according to Sergeant, are the twin corruptions of human thought from which the doctrine of considerabilities is designed to deliver us. And if it is granted that freedom from contradiction and irrelevance is the mark of philosophical activity rightly conducted, philosophy itself may be said to depend on the doctrine of considerabilities—on the recognition of its validity, and of its value as the one remedy against contradiction and irrelevance. But this, it seems, his Anglican adversaries could never be brought to understand; and Sergeant, with lively animus, confesses his failure to make them understand, in a passage in his *Literary Life* in which he proclaims his own life-long dedication to the exercise of the logical virtues which they failed so much as to recognise:

¹⁵ *Fifth Catholic Letter*, pp. 64, 65–66.

Your Lordship will discern how all my endeavours aim[ed] at settling truth, theirs at avoiding that impossible work . . . My chief care [was] to keep them tight to the question, and as it were within the lists, and their care and method [was] to ramble and weary any man's patience out with following them. And in this only they have been too hard for me. For I could never hold them to the true point.¹⁶

3. THE PRINCIPLE OF IDENTITY

"We metaphysicians", remarks Sergeant, "think nothing to stand firm [i.e. to exist] but by *being*, or *being-held-to-be*, truly what it is".¹⁷ This is one of his affirmations, of that cardinal principle of Aristotelian epistemology, whose meaning Bishop Butler was to reduce to the simple, self-explanatory formula, "Everything is what it is and not another thing".

Sergeant makes two distinct claims for the Aristotelian principle of identity. Viewing it from a philosophical standpoint, he follows Digby and White in claiming for it the status of the fundamental condition of rational discourse and the basis of all true knowledge or "science". It is "the last resort of all Evidence", the source of "all Science *a priori*", and in this crucial sense "instructive". But it is also, Sergeant claims, a weapon of great value in controversy, being the most effective means to "silence the sceptic". For by "resolving" a disputed proposition into an identical proposition *to which the sceptic cannot but assent*, one forces his assent also to the disputed proposition, by showing it to be "contained in", or to follow "by necessary connexion of terms" from, the identical proposition.

In his rationalist claim for the instructiveness of identical propositions, Sergeant is irremediably at a cross-purpose with his empiricist adversaries. Jeremy Taylor, Tillotson, Stillingfleet, and Locke insist on judging identical propositions by criteria appropriate to "synthetic" propositions, thus pronouncing them to be "uninstructive" because they are not empirically verifiable. Sergeant, on the other hand, consistently treats them as "analytic" propositions, which are "instructive" in the sense that they affirm the identity of subject and predicate, and by this "necessary connexion of terms" command unqualified assent to their *logical* truth. The function of these non-empirical, logical, "analytic" propositions is clearly brought out in Sergeant's statement, that "such General Maxims"—meaning, identical propositions—"are

¹⁶ *Literary Life*, Address to the Duke of Perth.

¹⁷ John Sergeant, *Sure-Footing in Christianity* (London, 1665), p. 340.

never used to *deduce* Conclusions from them, but to *reduce* Inferior Truths to them".¹⁸

Taking his cue again from Thomas White, Sergeant elaborates White's distinction between identical propositions ("A man is a man") and definitions ("A man is a rational animal"). The proposition "A man is a man", he calls a "first-principle"—a "nature-taught Proposition", so "naturally ingrafted in us" that it obliges all men "under forfeiture of their nature to acquiesce in [its] verity". In other words, being a declaration of the identity of subject and predicate which no rational mind can fail to recognise *as* identical, its truth is self-evident and therefore apodeictical. On the other hand, a true definition, like "A man is a rational creature", certainly presupposes the self-evident truth of the propositions "A man is a man" and "A rational creature is a rational creature"—that is, presupposes the capacity to recognise the identity of a man and of a rational creature. But the proposition itself, "A man is a rational creature", enjoys only what Sergeant calls "practical self-evidence", because it is acquired by "a long course of observation heedfully attending to the actions of men as men".¹⁹ In other words, a definition is ultimately derived from experience ("observation") and is therefore empirically true or false; while an identical proposition, being self-evidently or analytically true, is independent of all experience or "observation".

This is why, Sergeant adds, identical propositions cannot form the premises of a syllogism. Using the stock example, "All men are mortal/ Socrates is a man/ therefore, Socrates is mortal", he explains that a conclusion can be drawn only from premises containing three distinct terms (here, "man", "mortal", "Socrates"), not from two identical terms ("man", "man") and a middle term ("Socrates"). Yet every syllogistic argument presupposes at each step the capacity to recognise identity and difference: in this instance, that a man is a man, not a tree, that a mortal creature is a mortal creature, not an immortal angel, that Socrates is Socrates, not Alcibiades; in other words, that the identical propositions "A man is a man", "A mortal creature is a mortal creature", "Socrates is Socrates", are self-evidently true.

Sergeant uses his distinction between identical propositions and definitions to good effect in his critical examination of Descartes'

¹⁸ *Solid Philosophy*, p. 367.

¹⁹ John Sergeant, *Reason against Raillery* (n.p., 1672), p. 18; and for the following paragraph, cf. pp. 10–11, 29f. For further discussion of Sergeant's "practical self-evidence" in contradistinction to "speculative self-evidence", see ch. 6, below.

cogito.²⁰ His critique takes the form of an analysis of the different meanings of the term “first-principle”, when used of the principle of identity and of the *cogito*. When Sergeant speaks of the principle of identity as a “first-principle”, he means that it is a fundamental condition or co-implicate of discursive thought; when Descartes calls the *cogito* a “first-principle”, he means that it is the basic postulate of his theory of knowledge. Sergeant’s principle of identity is a genuine *first-principle*, because it is presupposed by all other principles: Descartes’ *cogito* is merely a definition. And that the *cogito* is no first-principle but only a definition, Sergeant demonstrates by reducing it to an identical proposition, thus proving that it presupposes the principle of identity, and therefore cannot itself be a first-principle.

The proof is as follows:²¹ —

To perceive = to understand; to understand = to know; therefore, to perceive = to know. To perceive clearly and distinctly = to know perfectly; therefore, the proposition “I know that to be true which I clearly and distinctly perceive to be so” = “What I know to be true I know to be true”, or “I know what I know”. “Which”, comments Sergeant, “is a good Confident Saying; and, moreover, true too”. But to make “I know what I know” the *rule of truth*, which is what Descartes claims for it, is ridiculous. It is ridiculous because it makes an identical proposition the basic postulate of a *theory* of knowledge, which claims to explain the “cause” of our knowledge and must therefore start from *definitions*, not from identical propositions.

Descartes is thus caught on the horns of a dilemma. If the *cogito* is the basic postulate of a theory of knowledge, it is a definition, and therefore cannot be a “first-principle”, as Descartes claims, because first-principles are always identical propositions, never definitions. If on the other hand the *cogito* is a first-principle, it can only be a first-principle when reduced to the identical proposition “I know what I know”; but in that case it cannot be the criterion (“rule”) of truth that Descartes says it is. Sergeant’s own view is that the *cogito* is just a muddle—neither a genuine first-principle, like the principle of identity, nor a genuine definition of a “rule of truth”, since it is reducible to the identical proposition “I know what I know”. And, Sergeant concludes, “to say a Thing is because it is, or, I know it because I know it, is more

²⁰ See *Non Ultra*, pp. 82–83.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

like a Woman's Reason when she is Fix'd and Wilful than a Rational Man's or a Philosopher's".²²

Sergeant's treatment of the Cartesian *cogito* also illustrates his other great claim for the principle of identity, that it is invaluable in polemic "to silence the sceptic" and "compose all differences in opinion". Sergeant develops this doctrine in *Reason against Raillery*²³, his reply to an attack by Tillotson. He recognises that to resolve first-principles into identical propositions "bears a show of ridiculousness and seems to admit of no possibility of advance towards new knowledge". But, he argues, "definitions are often liable to dispute, but Identical Propositions never"; and while "all the Scepticks in the world admit Identical Propositions to be true, yet the same men quarrel every Definition extant". Therefore, to deal with a sceptic who denies a true definition (for example, "Virtue is laudable"), the most effective method is to reduce that definition to the identical propositions implicit in it; and since the sceptic cannot but assent to these, he must of logical necessity assent to the definitions that have been thus re-stated. This is how Sergeant puts it:

The chief Reason why we put those Tacit Propositions into Formal ones is for the Scepticks sakes; who having an utter Aversion against Metaphysicks would not heed the Metaphysical Verity of Things unless it were produced and forced upon them by putting it into such an undeniable Form of Speech as all Mankind uses, and must grant . . . Scepticks will not admit anything to be True but Identical Propositions only. For which reason, I have attempted in my Method to give some Hints how to reduce all others to them.²⁴

He gives these "hints" in many of his works. Thus in *Reason against Raillery* he demonstrates how the definition, "Virtue is laudable", may be reduced to the identical proposition, "What's according to Right Reason (or Human Nature) is according to Right Reason"—which cannot but command the assent of the sceptic:

If two Notions ["virtue" and "laudable"] are to be shown connected which seem'd remote, the Notions which directly compounded their Definitions are to be resolv'd further, and their resolution pursu'd, till something appears in both of them which is formally identical, that is, till some Identical Proposition comes to be engag'd. For example, if one would prove that *Virtue is Laudable*, he will find that Laudable is deserving to be spoken well of, and Practical Self-Evidence as well as Reason telling us that our *Speech* being fram'd naturally to express our *Thoughts*, that thing deserves to be thought

²² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²³ For the following quotations, see *Reason against Raillery*, p. 16.

²⁴ *Solid Philosophy*, pp. 382–383.

well of, and that what's according to our Right Nature, or True Reason, deserves to be judg'd Right or Good, that is, thought well of; and withal, that Virtue is a Disposition to act according to *Right Reason*, it comes to appear that *Virtue* and *Laudable* have in their Notions something that is *formally Identical*, and that this Proposition is as Certain as that *What's according to Right Reason* (or Humane Nature) is *according to Right Reason*: which seen, the thing is concluded, and all further disquisition surceases.²⁵

Reducing this somewhat prolix analysis to syllogistic form, we would presumably get something like this: —

"Laudable" is [i.e. means] "deserving to be thought and spoken well of";

"Virtue" is "a disposition to act according to right reason";

But what is according to right reason is deserving to be thought and spoken well of;

Therefore, virtue is deserving to be thought and spoken well of;
That is, virtue is laudable.

This argument certainly presupposes the recognition that virtue is virtue and not another thing—not, for example, vanity or efficiency or skill in mathematics; that what is laudable is laudable, and not, e.g. reprehensible or ridiculous; and that "what's according to right reason is according to right reason", and not e.g. according to the law of the jungle or the doctrine of transubstantiation. Besides presupposing these logical-linguistic truths or truisms, the argument also makes large metaphysical assumptions: that "virtue is a disposition to act according to right reason", that "our speech [is] fram'd naturally to express our thoughts", that "right reason" is the same as "our true nature". If challenged about these assumptions, Sergeant might reply (unconsciously invoking the principles of Socrates' dialectical method) that they are perfectly legitimate because *shared* by his Christian adversaries; and moreover they are made openly and explicitly, not surreptitiously insinuated into the argument. And if we hinted that it is perhaps an open question whether by this argument "the thing is concluded", and "all further disquisition surceases", Sergeant might retort that it is also an open question whether all men are capable of recognising a rational argument, and that he is addressing himself to those who are, not to those who are not.

At any rate, the key point of his method, says Sergeant, is "putting it [the disputed proposition] into such an undeniable Form of Speech as all Mankind uses, and must grant"; in other words, to re-state the proposition that has been denied, in a form that compels the other man to recognise an identity or difference

²⁵ *Reason against Raillery*, p. 43.

he has previously failed to recognise. The procedure itself obviously rests on a crucial assumption—that we *know* what identities and differences we wish him to acknowledge; and that we know these identities and differences to be *true*: in Sergeant's phrase, that we are in secure possession of "the metaphysical verity of things". Such security of possession, Sergeant shows, can be assured only by a metaphysical doctrine as comprehensive and coherent as that to which he subscribes. Only on the foundation of the Aristotelian synthesis of realism and conceptualism, is he able to claim for the identical propositions he wishes the sceptic to acknowledge, the status of true statements about the real; for only on that foundation is he able to affirm a necessary connexion between true propositions ("A man is a man"), true conceptions or apprehensions (the recognition that a man is a man, not a tree), and the real existence of that which is apprehended by the mind and articulated in propositions. Thus, he is able to affirm the unity of metaphysics, epistemology, and logic, by an argument exemplifying a classic Thomist blend of Aristotelian and Christian doctrine.

His argument runs as follows: That God created all things after the model of His own unchangeable ideas, and endowed each thing with a unique essence or nature, is the primary *metaphysical* verity. This is the first truth in the order of nature—that everything is fixed in its nature, that it is what it is. Therefore, he is able to argue, the primary *epistemological* verity—the first truth in the order of the human mind—is to recognise *that* each thing is what it is; and this is to acknowledge the principle of identity as the one necessary condition of knowing. From this it follows that the first *logical* verity—the first truth in the order of human discourse—is to affirm the identity of subject and predicate in the form of identical propositions. The connexion of terms in such identical propositions is necessary because the recognitions of identity and difference that they express are true; and those recognitions are true because they are recognitions of the verity of things.

Sergeant invokes this argument in variant forms in many places in his writings, sometimes in copious detail, sometimes laconically. The following is one of his briefer statements: —

There cannot be any so great Clearness or Evidence as is Self-Evidence; nor so Close Connexion of the terms in any Proposition or Speech that expresses Truth, as is Perfect Identity or Self-Connexion; consisting in this, that the Thing, or Mode of Thing spoken of is what it is, or is itself . . . 'Tis impossible anything else can be so Solid, or so Firmly Establish'd, being immediately built on the

Unchangeable Metaphysical Verity itself; or, rather, *being* it, spoken, and express'd.²⁶

I go back to Sergeant's concept of "practical self-evidence", to consider briefly its Aristotelian and other connections. Viewed as an element of Sergeant's system of logic, it appears to be akin to Aristotle's "rational intuition".²⁷ It is designed to answer the question, "How do we arrive at the indispensable middle term of a syllogistic argument?" Aristotle had defined "quick wit" as the "hitting upon the middle term instantaneously": "He [the witty man] has seen the major and minor terms, and then grasped the causes, the middle terms".²⁸ Sergeant's "practical self-evidence" appears to operate in a somewhat similar way:

First, by due consideration and reflexion, Practical Self-Evidence still assisting, . . . the Proper Causes and Effects of such a nature begin to appear; and thence Middle Terms for Demonstrative Syllogisms disclose themselves; and Science begins to spread itself and advance.²⁹

There is this difference, however: that while Aristotle emphasises the *instantaneousness* of the insight, that the middle term, which is the true cause, is perceived in a single intuitive flash, Sergeant sees it as a more discursive process. The middle terms are "collected" from "a long course of observation"; they do not come instantaneously but "disclose themselves" (presumably, more or less slowly); "the proper causes . . . *begin* to appear"; and "science *begins* to spread itself". Indeed Sergeant's view of what Aristotle called "the originaive source of our scientific knowledge" would seem to fall somewhere between Aristotle's pure rationalist intuitionism, and the pure empiricism that sees empirical-experimental method as the originaive source. Like Thomas White, Sergeant is empiricist to the extent that he recognises that true causes must be "collected" from "a long course of observation", but rationalist as ever in insisting that those true causes are uncovered, not by the "method" itself, not by the instrument of enquiry, but by the introspective powers of the human mind.

In *Solid Philosophy Asserted*, Sergeant is mainly intent on exposing the "ideist" shortcomings of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. But, significantly, he expresses warm approval of Locke's intuitionism in Book IV of the *Essay*. In his view, Locke

²⁶ *Non Ultra*, p. 23.

²⁷ Cf. ch. 2, above.

²⁸ *Posterior Analytics* 89b 10.

²⁹ *Reason against Raillery*, pp. 42–43.

introduces "intuition" into his theory of knowledge, in order to explain the self-evidence of self-evident propositions—which is exactly what Sergeant himself had been endeavouring to do in his account of the principle of identity:

Myself have long ago had such a Thought, tho' I expressed it warily in these words: 'There is nothing in all Knowledge that, in the manner of it, comes so near the Angelical Intuition as does our knowledge of Self-evident Principles, express'd by Identical Propositions.

And to this he adds a typical self-congratulatory comment:

'Tis not on this occasion only, but in divers others, tho' I have not always noted them, that Mr. Locke and myself have, without design'd Confederacy, agreed in Positions of great Moment; which, I know not how, have escap'd the Thoughts of all other Authors I have seen.³⁰

This evokes from Locke, unmoved by Sergeant's fraternal gesture, a sour note in the margin against this passage in his copy of *Solid Philosophy*:

Yes, it is easily observable in his book, which was published 6 or 7 years after Mr Locke's, that it has many things in it very conformable to what Mr L had published soe long before.³¹

Locke's comment happens to be unjust as well as unkind; for the remark Sergeant himself quotes, first appeared in his *Methodus compendiosa*, published in Paris in 1674—sixteen years before the appearance of the *Essay* in 1690. The quotation in *Solid Philosophy* that incurs Locke's opprobrium was based, however, on a passage in Sergeant's *Method to Science*, published in London in 1696. As Locke had probably never read *Methodus compendiosa*, he could not perhaps be blamed for his mistake; and if there is a certain acerbity in the tone of his comment, this may be ascribed to the irritation induced by Sergeant's complacency and general ebullience.

The occasional excesses of Sergeant's personal style may also have done him a disservice in his efforts to make his claims for the principle of identity intelligible to his Anglican adversaries. Perhaps their objections could not have been overcome in any circumstances: like Locke, they were convinced that identical propositions were "trivial" and "uninstructive", and they neither understood, nor perhaps wanted to understand, what Sergeant

³⁰ *Solid Philosophy*, pp. 323, 324.

³¹ Locke's copy of *Solid Philosophy Asserted* with his marginal comments (in the third person throughout) is to be found in the Library of St. John's College, Cambridge.

was driving at.³² But Sergeant on his side did not make it easier for them by the effusive encomiums he allowed himself from time to time, which might well have worked on their nerves. A passage such as the following, for instance, on the transcendent virtues of an identical proposition, was not likely to inspire confidence in Sergeant's sobriety as a philosopher:

No disease can so pervert a Rational Being which has the least Use of Reason as to deny it, or doubt of it; nor suspend their Judgement concerning it. Nor can the highest Passion of the most Profligate Wretch living hurry his Understanding into the Admittance of such a Folly [that it may be false]. No Scepticalness can call the Truth and Certainty of it into question. No Whimsical Speculation can inveigle any Man into a Conceit that it can be False . . . No subtil Distinction can impair its Truth; or pretend it is True in One Respect but not in Another . . .³³

But for the most part Sergeant was sober enough, expounding his doctrine with exemplary precision and a patience to match; and never forgetting that the doctrine which the Anglican bishops found so unintelligible or tiresome or both, rests on the profound Aristotelian insight, that without the recognition of identity and difference there is no knowledge. This is what Sergeant is saying, in his own propositional language, in another of his acute observations on Locke's intuitionist doctrine:

'Tis manifest, that however one Proposition may be made known by other Propositions that are connected and consequential to one another; yet the Consequence itself cannot be proved by another Consequence.³⁴

In other words, if you cannot recognise, by the Aristotelian "rational intuition" or whatever, that a consequence is a consequence, (i.e. that the consequence-proposition you are looking at is a consequence, irreducibly itself and not another thing), you declare yourself by this failure of recognition incapable of rational discourse, and therefore incapable of acquiring knowledge ("science"). And this, Sergeant claims, is the whole case for arguing that the recognition of identity and difference, is the fundamental condition of the reasoning activity that leads to

³² See e.g. Tillotson, *Rule of Faith*, I.1.1–3; Preface to his Sermons, in *Works*, ed. T. Birch (3 vols.; London, 1752) I, vii–viii, xi–xii; and Jeremy Taylor's Introduction to his Second Part of the *Dissuasive from Popery*, in *A Collection of Polemicall Discourses* (London 1674), pp. 365–366.

³³ *Non Ultra*, p. 24.

³⁴ *Solid Philosophy*, p. 325 (my emphasis); quoted with minor changes from *Method*, p. 226.

“science”, and that the principle of identity is therefore “the last resort of all Evidence in the world”.

This exalted function of the principle of identity may be better understood within the framework of Sergeant’s whole theory of knowledge or “science”. This has already been touched on, and now requires closer examination.

CHAPTER SIX

SERGEANT THE ARISTOTELIAN (II): THEORY OF SCIENCE

1. "NECESSARY CONNEXION OF TERMS"

In treatise after treatise Sergeant reiterates the fundamental doctrines of Aristotle's theory of knowledge, or "science", as he understands it. All genuinely scientific knowledge is demonstrative, and every system of scientific knowledge is a deductive system on the model of geometry. Because the system is wholly deductive ("a long chain of discourse"), all its component propositions are apodeictically true. The demonstration of their apodeictical truth is effected by exhibiting "a necessary connexion of terms", in the first-principles, or premises, of the long chain of discourse, and in each successive proposition deduced from the premises. In the first-principles, the necessary connexion of terms is "immediate", meaning self-evident; in the deduced propositions it is "mediate" or "mediated"; and in either case the necessity of the connexion between subject and predicate is grasped by the Aristotelian "rational intuition", or an intellectual power akin to it. The true "method to science" is thus always didactical, in the sense in which Aristotle used the term didactical, in contradistinction to dialectical; it is solely a process of "laying down" definitions and drawing out the logical consequences, i.e. the full *meaning*, of the definitions.

The following are two statements out of scores in Sergeant's writings, affirming the crucial importance of the "necessary connexion of terms" in the making of a demonstrative system of knowledge:

'Tis Connexion of Terms which I only esteem as Proper to advance Science. Where I find not such Connexion, and the Discourse grounded on Self-evident Principles, or (which is the same) on the Metaphysical Verity of the Subject, which engages the Nature of the Thing, I neither expect Science can be gain'd, nor the Method to Science Establish'd.¹

And again:

All connexion being necessarily immediate, or seen by virtue of immediateness, and to see immediate connexion being the producer of certain knowledge, or of assurance the thing cannot but

¹ *Method*, Preface.

be so, it follows that to see the truth of such propositions, or which is all one, *the immediate connexion of their terms*, is to see they cannot but be so; or that they are absolutely void of all possibility of falsehood.²

This is why Sergeant can confidently affirm that “to be contained in the Antecedent is the Praise of an Inference”. What a non-rationalist, empiricist theory of science, like Locke’s, would dismiss as uninformative tautology is, according to Sergeant’s rationalist-deductive doctrine, not only legitimate but a shining merit; and it is so because “All Science and Demonstration do consist in the Connexion of Terms”, and “All Rational Assents flow from seeing the Immediate Connexion of one Term with another”.³

The meaning and force of Sergeant’s Aristotelian theory of science become clearer as one watches him using it in practice against his distinguished adversaries, the Anglican bishops. He is on the great subject of the Christian rule of faith, and explains exactly what his quarrel is with Taylor, Tillotson, and Stillingfleet—whom, picking up Thomas White’s phrase, he calls the “Probability Men”. These Probability Men, he says, are content to claim for their rule of faith (their interpretation of Scripture) no more than the “highest probability”, “sufficient certainty”, or what they call “moral certainty”. They readily admit that they cannot prove their rule of faith to be *infallibly* certain. But they view this supposed defect with equanimity, because they simply deny Sergeant’s basic postulate about the Christian rule of faith, that it *must* be infallibly certain in order to be the instrument of salvation it is designed to be.⁴ To Sergeant, this easy latitudinarian attitude is a logical absurdity and a moral outrage. And he starts with the logical absurdity, to prove it by an argument based on the Aristotelian principle of identity, and the method of “resolving” a disputed proposition into an identical proposition, in which the “necessary connexion of terms” is so self-evident that the adversary cannot but assent to its truth.

The argument is as follows: Since everything is what it is and not another thing, and is certainly never its own contradictory, that which is true is incapable of being false. In other words, the

² Quoted in *Blakloanae Haeresis*, p. 259.

³ *Solid Philosophy*, p. 132; *Faith Vindicated*, pp. 15–16.

⁴ For the bishops’ argument see Tillotson, *Rule of Faith*, pp. 161f.; Preface to his Sermons, in *Works* i.ii–vi; Stillingfleet, *A Discourse concerning the Nature and Grounds of the Certainty of Faith*, in *Works* (6 vols.; London 1707f.), vi.378–379, 385–386, 406; Taylor, Introduction to Second Part of the *Dissuasive from Popery in Polemicall Discourses*, pp. 351–380, esp. 365–368.

term “true” means “incapable of being false”. Now, a rule of faith is *by definition* true—that is, by the definition “conceded” by all Christians and thus necessarily by the adversaries, the Anglican bishops. But a rule of faith that is by definition true, is incapable of being false; and “incapable of being false” means “infallibly true”. Therefore, whatever is incapable of being false is infallibly true; therefore, a rule of faith *must* be infallibly true; and to claim for it less than infallible truth, as the “Probability Men” do, is to deny the logical consequences of the definition of a rule of faith that they themselves have assented to—which is the same as to deny the very foundation of rational discourse.⁵

This is the argument from logic: that is, from the meanings of the key terms “true”, “false”, “infallible”, “rule of faith”, and the ineluctable implications of these meanings. It also illustrates Sergeant’s rationalist dictum, that “to be contained in the Antecedent is the Praise of an Inference”. For here, all the inferences (logical consequences) are certainly “contained in” the antecedents, i.e. necessarily implied by the meanings of the key terms; and this is what ensures the “necessary connexion of terms” in each successive proposition of the argument, and thus the apodeictical (demonstrative) truth of its conclusion—viz. that a rule of faith must necessarily be infallibly true.

Sergeant then goes on to prove the moral turpitude involved in the doctrine of the Probability Men. The objections to it drawn from logic, he contends, are decisively confirmed by their practice. They may *say* that they claim for their rule of faith nothing more than the “highest probability”, “sufficient certainty”, or mere “moral certainty”; but what they *do*, gives the lie to the seeming-modesty of their claim. For what they do is to persecute Nonconformists, censure Arians, excommunicate Socinians, and preach against the “enthusiasm” of the “private spirit” in the crucial matter of scriptural interpretation; and on what ground, asks Sergeant, can they justify such practices, but on the ground that the interpretation of Scripture laid down by the Anglican Church is *infallibly* true? If they do not claim infallibility, they stand convicted, both of a blatant contradiction between their theory and their practice, and, as a consequence of the contradiction, of the un-Christian iniquity of persecuting fellow Protestants whose interpretation of Scripture may *for all they can know* be as good

⁵ For this argument, see e.g. *Sure-footing*, pp. 1–11; *Faith Vindicated*, pp. 1–43, 54–55, 91–107, 143–144; *Reason against Raillery*, Preface, and pp. 97ff., 231–233; *Error non-plust*, pp. 2–3.

as their own. If, on the other hand, they concede (as Sergeant's argument has shown them they must) that the Christian rule of faith, being a rule of faith, must be infallibly true, they are obliged to prove that what they claim to be their rule of faith is infallibly true—and desist from seeking refuge in such canting evasions as “highest probability” and “moral certainty”.

This is how Sergeant puts it in *Faith Vindicated*, with the emphasis on the language they use and the implications of their linguistic usages: “I appeal to the constant Expressions of all who are generally call'd and reputed Christians; and challenge my Adversaries to produce one Expression of theirs which sounds thus dwindlingly and feebly as if it meant only some *high likelihood*, or their apprehension of it as no more but such”.⁶ And, to bring home the full absurdity of their self-deception, he breaks into angry irony, to compose an imaginary discourse that the Christian martyr might address to the Emperor Nero, or Diocletian, on the principles of the Probability Men:

I beseech you (great Nero, or Diocletian!) understand us Christians right. We deny not absolutely the possibility of your opposit Tenets being true, nor assert our own Faith so far as to say it may not possibly be False. What we profess is only this that it seems to us so highly probable, or Morally-Certain, that we have no Actual Doubt of it at present; though we cannot absolutely say but we may come to discover it to be false hereafter, and your opposit Tenets true, and so renounce Christianity and joyn with you. Indeed we dare venture a thousand to one (or perhaps something more) that our Faith is true; yet for all that we shall not stick to lay one to a thousand 'tis false.⁷

Thus inexorably Sergeant proves, mainly from the language actually used by the Anglican bishops, but also from their practice, that a genuine rule of faith cannot be other than infallibly certain; and that those who cannot prove their rule to be infallibly certain, have no grounds for claiming that they possess a rule of faith at all.

Sergeant's Anglican adversaries, of course, dismissed his all-or-nothing demand for the apodeictical certainty of the Christian rule of faith, as an intolerable piece of extremism. But they were not alone in rejecting it. Some of Sergeant's fellow-Catholics found it equally objectionable, though on somewhat different grounds. *Blakloanae Haeresis* explicitly pronounces Sergeant's (and White's)

⁶ *Faith Vindicated*, p. 93. See also pp. 33–34, 96–103, 109–115; *Error non-plust*, pp. 9–10, 158–160, 171–179; *Fifth Catholick Letter*, Preface.

⁷ *Faith Vindicated*, pp. 101–102.

insistence on “necessary connexion of terms” as the only acceptable ground of assent to the fundamental points of the Catholic faith, to be the “*radix omnium haeresum Blackloi & Sargentii*”; and it earlier quotes three passages (“Three Propositions”) from Sergeant’s works, purporting to give the essence of the heresy.⁸ The Three Propositions are the following:

I He who is oblig’d to profess those Faith-propositions true must see the connexion between their terms, and consequently that they cannot possibly be inconnected or false.

II If the two terms be not seen to be connected, these propositions may, nay ought to be denied by the Respondent, whose office and right it is to grant nothing but what is evident, lest he ensnare himself.

III ’Tis requisit and necessary that the assent of Faith in diverse particular Believers be formally infallible, or that those persons be infallibly certain by evident reason, that the authority or rule of Faith they rely on cannot herein deceive them. Else great wits and acute Reflectors, whose piercing understandings require convictive grounds for their Faith, would remain for ever unsatisfy’d; nor could the wisest and Christians sincerely and heartily assent to, nor with honesty profess the truth of their faith, nor could any prove it true, or establish rational doubters in it, or convert men of exact Knowledge to it, or convince hereticks calling the truth of it in question. Nor could Governors and leading persons with any conscience or credit propose and preach the truth of Faith to the Generality.⁹

It is not difficult to see why there should be Christian objections to the doctrine developed in these passages. The basic criticism is the same as that advanced against Thomas White’s haughty intellectualism—that it makes the saving faith of the Catholic Church inaccessible to all but those “superior wits” who are capable of seeing the necessary connexion of terms in the fundamental propositions of the faith, and who assent on the ground of that logical necessity alone; which is the same as to say that Christ was crucified for the redemption solely of philosophers and theologians.

Sergeant’s statement of his doctrine in the passages reproduced in *Blakloanae Haeresis* does seem to justify this interpretation. It does seem to add up to a rationalist theology that combines the un-Christian exclusivism of the Calvinist doctrine of election, and the thinly disguised fideism of the Cartesians, with a somewhat chilling insensibility to the meaning of the gospel of love. But

⁸ *Blackloanae Haeresis*, pp. 263, 35–36.

⁹ *Faith Vindicated*, pp. 13, 41 (cf. pp. 265–268); *Error non-plust*, p. 135. Numerous other passages from Sergeant’s works are quoted in *Blakloanae Haeresis*: see esp. pp. 80–148 *passim*, 158–167, 256–295 *passim*.

the author of *Blakloanae Haeresis* has in fact seriously—and unfairly—misrepresented Sergeant's total position. Unfairly, because already in his *Letter of Thanks* to Tillotson (1666), in *Faith Vindicated* (1667), from which several of the condemned propositions are taken, in *Reason against Raillery* (1672), and in *Error non-plust* (1673)—all published before the appearance of *Blakloanae Haeresis* in 1675—Sergeant had significantly moderated the demonstrative rigour of his definition of truth.

2. "PRACTICAL SELF-EVIDENCE" AND "SPECULATIVE SELF-EVIDENCE"

Taking his cue again from Thomas White, Sergeant had introduced and elaborated the distinction between "practical self-evidence" and "speculative self-evidence"—a distinction of central importance in his philosophy and theology, and a sufficient answer to the objections raised in *Blakloanae Haeresis*. Philosophically, the distinction may be seen as another attempt to solve a problem that has engaged the minds of philosophers from Socrates to John Stuart Mill. I have already touched on it in sketching the Platonic-Aristotelian distinction between the dialectical and didactical methods of argument, and I return to it in this fresh context. How is it possible, Socrates asks Meno¹⁰, that a political leader—a man, that is, by nature incapable of, or by circumstances incapacitated for, speculative thought—is yet capable of apprehending true distinctions, leading to what Socrates calls "right opinion"; and capable not only of apprehending them, but of possessing them with a security that enables him more or less consistently to *act* upon them in performing the tasks of his office? Socrates in the end has to postulate something in the nature of a divinely inspired intuition to account for the phenomenon; and it is just this intuitive, non-analytical, non-demonstrative kind of knowledge, that Sergeant has in mind when he speaks of knowledge based on "practical self-evidence".

Similarly, when J.S. Mill makes it his main criticism of Aristotelian logic, that reasoning is not, as Aristotle had laid down, from universals to particulars or particulars to universals, but "from particulars to particulars", he is grappling with essentially the same problem: how to account for those processes of human thought that are neither deductive nor inductive according to the received

¹⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 97; in *The Dialogues of Plato*, tr. B. Jowett (5 vols.; Oxford, 1875), i.301f..

definitions of these terms, yet do enable people to arrive at "right conclusions".

Sergeant's "practical self-evidence" is closely allied to the "prudence" or "sagacity" that he, along with White and Hobbes, postulates as the antithesis of "knowledge" or "science". Thomas White, we remember, defines "prudence" as "a power of conjecturing aptly"—the apt conjectures (Socrates' "right opinion" again) being derived from experience or "the testimony of the ever-corresponding effects". For Hobbes too, "prudence" is a power of conjecturing aptly on the basis of experience: "Prudence is a presumption of [i.e. conjecture about] the future, contracted from the experience of things past". Consequently, "by how much one man has more experience of things past, than another, by so much also he is more prudent, and his expectations the seldomer fail him". Compared with knowledge, or science, prudence is of course "uncertain" because "grounded only upon experience", which can never be exhaustive: "Such conjecture, through the difficulty of observing all circumstances, [is] very fallacious". But, like Socrates' man of right opinion, "he that has most experience in any kind of business, has most signs, whereby to guess at the future time; and consequently is the most prudent: and so much more prudent than he that is new in that kind of business, as not to be equalled by any advantage of natural and extemporary wit: though perhaps many young men think the contrary".¹¹

Sergeant's "practical self-evidence" may be seen as the epistemological counterpart of the psychological power "prudence", and his purpose in translating the psychological into the epistemological is presumably to give the concept of practical self-evidence a secure place in his theory of knowledge. Having ensured its philosophical integrity, he can use it to clear himself of the charge made against him in *Blakloanae Haeresis*, that the infallibility of the Catholic rule of faith (oral tradition) can be recognised and assented to only on the ground of "speculative self-evidence" (i.e. the apodeictical truth emanating from the "necessary connexion of terms" in the fundamental propositions of the faith); and also to confute his Anglican adversaries when they assault him with similar charges for their own Protestant reasons. Sergeant in effect offers "practical self-evidence" as an alternative means of coming into possession of the Catholic rule of faith; he claims that it is as efficacious a means as "speculative

¹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I.3. See also *Elements of Law*, I.4.

self-evidence" for the ends of an operative faith; and he insists that the rational satisfaction of assenting to the rule of faith on the ground of its "speculative self-evidence", is meant to be enjoyed *only* by those "great wits and acute reflectors whose piercing understandings require convictive [i.e. demonstrative] grounds for their faith".¹²

The great wits and acute reflectors, however, are expected to make a suitable return for this gift of special insight into the rational foundations of the Catholic faith. They (and only they) are required to use it to restore "rational doubters" to the faith, to "convert men of exact knowledge to it", and to "convince hereticks calling the truth of it in question". In other words, they are expected to use it for the proper ends of controversy, and for these alone—picking the rational doubters, men of exact knowledge, and heretics with care, to make sure that they on their side are capable of recognising the force of arguments based on speculative self-evidence. Sergeant handsomely meets these self-imposed obligations, which have doubtless sprung *post hoc* from his already active polemical pursuits; and some of his fullest statements of the doctrine of practical *versus* speculative self-evidence, occur in his exchanges with the Anglican bishops.

For example, in *Faith Vindicated*, a reply to an attack by Tillotson, he explains in elaborate detail the nature of practical self-evidence, starting with an analysis of the way in which the "vulgar" arrive at truth:

Their [the vulgar's] rational nature is led directly by a natural course to *see evidently* and assent to divers Conclusions without any Reflexion or Speculation; which rude but unerring draught of knowledge is . . . *Practical Self-Evidence*, because 'tis a natural result of *Practice* or ordinary converse with those things.

Then, drawing on the syllogism to make his point, he explains the difference between practical self-evidence and science:

It [practical self-evidence] differs from science in that a man of Science reflectingly sees a Medium [middle term] identifying the two Extreams, and is aware of the virtue of those Causes which beget Evidence; whereas the other is rather Passive from Natural Impressions than Active by any Self-industry in these knowledges, and rather *feels* the force of those Causes in his own Adhesion than *sees* it.

Next, he distinguishes between practical self-evidence and mere "opinion" (using "opinion" in a sense somewhat different from Socrates in *Meno*):

¹² *Error non-plust*, p. 135.

This *Practical Self-evidence* is notwithstanding *True Knowledge*, though perhaps it be the slightest kind of it: in which 'tis different from *Opinion* [which is] built on probabilities.

Finally, he claims that it can be "collected" from these several distinctions, "that what is practically Self-evident to the Unlearned is Demonstrable to the Learned".¹³

He takes up the topic again, to pursue it with fresh energy, in *Reason against Raillery*, subtitled "A Full Answer to Dr. Tillotson's Preface against J.S. With a farther Examination of his Grounds of Religion". This time the difference between speculative self-evidence and practical self-evidence is presented as two distinct ways of arriving at the true rule of faith:

Those who are arriv'd to a great pitch of Learning come to it [faith] by absolutely concluding proofs, call'd *Demonstrations*, that is, by penetrating the nature of the Authority on which it is built . . . In these men, though the Truth of their Tenet be indeed taken from the Object (as 'tis always), yet the Clearness, Distinctness, and firm Strength of it springs from the Perfection of their well-cultivated Understanding. [Whereas] those who are of a weak pitch are led to it by Practical Self-evidence of the nature of Authority; and of the way in common by which they receive Faith; which dim rude light even in the simplest, serves to carry them on to act according to right nature when they assent; but they cannot discourse [analyse] their thoughts, nor resolve them into Principles, nor answer Objections, nor see themselves clearly to be infallibly Certain.¹⁴

To this he adds the sound Christian observation, that we have to thank God's Providence for this beneficent arrangement: "it became God's goodness so to order things that the Acts of all the Faithful might be, as much as was possible, in men of every pitch and capacity, *Rational* or *Virtuous*". The fresh distinction he throws in, between "rational" and "virtuous", appears to intimate that assent to the true rule of faith on the basis of practical self-evidence, is (morally) virtuous though it is never rational—rational assent being confined exclusively to the realm of the speculatively self-evident. This may be taken as a gloss on the dictum of St Augustine he quotes later, which he treats as an epigraph for his whole discourse on speculative and practical self-evidence: "Some Persons are sav'd not by the quickness of their Understandings but by the Simplicity of their Belief".¹⁵

In *Error non-plust*, his polemic against Stillingfleet, Sergeant in the same spirit defends himself against Stillingfleet's accusa-

¹³ *Faith Vindicated*, pp. 134, 137–138.

¹⁴ *Reason against Raillery*, pp. 116–117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 117, 131.

tion that he expects every member of the Catholic Church to be “formally infallible”—that is, possessed of absolute, apodeictical (and hence “infallible”) truth, established by “formal” (i.e. logical, demonstrative, speculatively self-evident) proof. Sergeant tells him that he has totally misunderstood his doctrine. For, while Stillingfleet assumes “that there is no middle between no particular person and every particular person being formally infallible”, his position is “that some [i.e. the learned] *must* be so, most *may* be so, and all *need not* be so”.¹⁶ This may also be taken as his final reply to the charge against him in *Blackloanae Haeresis*, that he “evacuated faith” by insisting on “demonstration”, or speculative self-evidence, as the only ground of assent to the rule of faith.

3. SCIENCE AND EXPERIENCE

What has Sergeant’s Aristotelian theory of science to say about “experience” (sense-perception, observation, experiment) as a source of true knowledge? Given his rationalist conception of science as demonstration or nothing, given also his almost total lack of interest in the phenomenal world, which by itself is often enough to teach a man the limitations of a pure rationalism, it is not surprising that Sergeant should find it easy to reject the empiricist claim for experience as the basis of all valid knowledge. For Sergeant, as for Digby and White, the Hobbesian doctrine that “experience concludeth nothing universally” is unarguably true. In dismissing induction as a “method to science”, he seizes on some of the genuine problems it raises, especially for the rationalist mind. “The way of arguing by Induction can never breed *Science*”, he says —

First, because out of pure Particulars nothing follows. Next, because to Argue from some Part or Parts to the Whole, is Inconsequent. Wherefore we cannot thence infer an Universal Proposition, or gain Science of any Nature, unless we could enumerate all the Singulars in the World, that is, all the Parts, so to make up an Equivalent to the whole, which is Impossible.¹⁷

Similarly, “the way of Experiments cannot be a true method to science”, because —

We may observe that when an Experiment or (which is the same) a Matter of Fact in Nature is discover’d, we are never the nearer knowing what is the Proper Cause of such an Effect, into which we may certainly refund it; which, and only which, is the work of Science. For Gassendus will explicate it according to his Principles,

¹⁶ *Error non-plust*, pp. 207–208.

¹⁷ *Method*, p. 246.

Cartesius according to his, the noble Sir Kenelm Digby, and his most Learned Master Albius (whom I judge to have follow'd the true Aristotelian Principles) according to theirs so that, after all, the assigning the True Natural Cause for that Effect, and explicating it right, must be Decided by way of Reason; that is, by demonstrating first whose Principles of Natural Philosophy are True and Solid; and only He or They who can approve their Principles to be such can pretend to explicate their Natural Production right by resolving it into its Proper Causes, or to have Science how 'tis done. And, however the Experimental Men may be highly commendable in other respects, yet only those who can lay just Claim to True Principles, and make out their Title to them, can be truly held Natural Philosophers.¹⁸

What this brings home to us again, in Sergeant's discursive but lucid style, is the difference between the Aristotelian view of scientific method as proof or demonstration, and the Baconian and post-Baconian view of it as discovery. For Sergeant, assigning "a true natural cause for an effect and explicating it right", *means* to create a self-complete, self-enclosed demonstrative system on the model of a proof in geometry, which lays down primary definitions ("true principles"), and draws out the necessary consequences (i.e. the full meaning), of those definitions. To draw out this self-complete, self-enclosed system of propositions from the primary definitions, *is* to demonstrate that those definitions are the "true causes" we are seeking. The criterion of truth, in other words, is exclusively analytic.

This is why Sergeant can be so blandly (and uncomprehendingly) indifferent to the efforts of Gassendi, "Cartesius", Digby, and even Thomas White ("Master Albius") to *discover* the true causes of phenomena—that is, to create a system of natural science (e.g. physics), that shall be synthetically (empirically) as well as analytically true. Sergeant is simply not interested in the synthetic-empirical dimension of scientific truth. Consequently, he regards the empirical enquiries of Gassendi, Descartes, and the rest as merely a superior kind of game. They are playing at hypothesis-making, "pretending" that this explanation or that is the right one; but, being adults not children, they are unable to claim for their make-believe explanations anything more than a greater or smaller degree of probability. This, Sergeant argues, brings us no nearer to science, which deals not in probabilities but in certainties. And this apodeictical truth, which is the aim and end of the scientific enterprise, can be attained only in the way Aristotle had

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Preface.

prescribed—by drawing “a long thread of science” out of the first definitions, or in other words, by approximating the method of natural science to the method of geometry.

That this is Sergeant’s whole view of scientific method is decisively shown in the passages in *The Method to Science* dealing with the crucial importance of definition in the quest for scientific knowledge. Nowhere does he attempt to answer Glanvill’s challenging comment, that laying down definitions is all very well, but—how came he by his definitions? Sergeant considers it sufficient to declare baldly that “Definitions are one of the best Instruments or Best Means to attain Science”, and to give this as the reason:

Definitions explicating or unfolding the Nature of the Thing, and all Proper Causes and Effects being so nearly ally’d to the Nature of the Thing, it follows that there lies involv’d in the Definitions all Essential and Proper Middle Terms to demonstrate whatever belongs to the Notion Defin’d, if Right Logick and Studious Industry be not wanting.¹⁹

“Right logick” and “studious industry”, we observe, are the essential qualifications of the man of science; and they are both properties of the ratiocinative mind. “Right logick” is successful reasoning according to the known (Aristotelian) rules of logical discourse, namely the rules of the syllogism. “Studious industry” is *not* patient observation, hypothesis-making, experimentation, and comparing and re-comparing deductions (predictions) from hypotheses with the results of experiments. It is the purely rational activity of industriously drawing out *all* the logical consequences of the primary definitions, all the meaning “contained in” the definitions; and of thus creating the perfect demonstrative system which is the definition of science as Aristotle conceived it.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 256, Preface.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SERGEANT ON LOCKE: IDEISM AND LANGUAGE

In his major treatise *Solid Philosophy Asserted against the Fancies of the Ideists*, Sergeant undertakes an extended critique of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Written late in life, some ten years before his death, *Solid Philosophy* is a wide-ranging restatement of Sergeant's principal doctrines in logic, epistemology, and metaphysics, which typically owes its freshness and force to the polemical situation in which he makes it. The treatise also contains Sergeant's fullest statement of his view of the place of language in philosophy, developed in response to Locke's theory of language in Book III of the *Essay*.

As the interest of Sergeant's critique is almost all in his detailed exposure of what he sees as the fatal flaws in Locke's system, it will be helpful to review briefly the Lockean doctrines that he mainly takes issue with, starting with the most inclusive—what Sergeant calls Locke's "ideism".

1. IDEISM

The following passages from the *Essay* exemplify what Sergeant is referring to when he speaks of Locke's ideism. The first is the opening passage of Book IV:

Since the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate; it is evident that our knowledge is only conversant about them. Knowledge then, seems . . . to be nothing but the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy, of any of our ideas.¹

The next passage is explicit about the delusiveness of the quest for "things as really they are":

Because men would not be thought to talk barely of their own imaginations, but of things as really they are, therefore they often suppose their words to stand also for the reality of things . . . Give me leave here to say that it is a perverting the use of words, and brings unavoidable obscurity and confusion into their signification, whenever we make them stand for anything but those ideas we have in our minds.²

¹ *Essay* IV.1.1–2.

² *Ibid.*, III.2.5.

Again, on the meaning of "genus" and "species":

It is true, there is ordinarily supposed a real constitution of the sorts [species] of things; and it is past doubt, there must be some real constitution on which any collection of simple ideas co-existing must depend. But it being evident that things are ranked under names into sorts or species, only as they agree to certain abstract ideas to which we have annexed those names, the essence of real genus or sort comes to be nothing but that abstract idea which the general or sortal . . . name stands for.³

And on the question, how do we determine the difference between a rational man and a changeling:

Nobody will doubt that the wheels or springs (if I may say so) within are different in a rational man and a changeling . . . But whether one or both the differences be essential or specific is only to be known to us by their agreement or disagreement with the complex idea that the name "man" stands for; for by that alone can it be determined whether one or both or neither of these be a man or no.⁴

2. MIXED MODES AND MAXIMS

The distinctive feature of Mixed Modes, which include "moral ideas" in Locke's classification of ideas, is that they "terminate in the idea that is in the mind", and that their names are wholly arbitrary. This distinguishes them from Simple Ideas, whose names, says Locke, "are perfectly taken from the existence of things", and from Substance, whose names also "refer to a pattern [*in rerum natura*] though with some latitude".⁵ Mixed Modes refer to no reality external to themselves. They are their own archetypes; their "nominal essence" and "real essence" are identical. Thus, a moral concept like justice, murder, or virtue, is merely the sum of the Simple Ideas composing it *plus* the name, having no existence outside of the conceiving mind.

In their *ad placitum* designation, Mixed Modes significantly resemble Simple Modes, i.e. mathematical concepts like triangle, space, time, infinity. The difference is, that while the name of a Simple Mode has a fixed and constant signification because it always stands for the same constituent Simple Ideas, that of a Mixed Mode is perpetually changing its signification: the collection of Simple Ideas composing one man's idea of justice, for instance, may be very different from those composing another man's, and the use of the same name only obscures these real differences in meanings.

³ *Ibid.*, III.3.15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III.6.38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III.4.2, 4.17.

This disability, however, Locke contends, is not irremediable. If people could be brought to recognise, first the desirability, then the possibility, of making the significations of our moral ideas as exact and constant as are those of our mathematical ideas, ethics would have the fairest chance of becoming a demonstrative science like mathematics. The advantage to a civil society would be inestimable, since it would put an end once and for all to the disputes and wranglings about morality that have for so long degraded human relations.

What Locke is recommending in effect is the creation of a scientific calculus for ethics; that is, of a language-system consisting of precise, unambiguous definitions of all the most important ethical terms in use in our society, together with rules of deduction by which the implications of the definitions (i.e. their full meaning), may be ineluctably drawn out. Such a systematisation of the language of ethics, undertaken and executed with deliberation, would leave as little room in ethics as in geometry for dispute or disagreement.

This revolutionary proposal becomes even more explicitly radical when Locke is answering the hypothetical charges directed against it by the orthodox moralists, who fear that the foundations of morality will be destroyed if it is once granted that ethical ideas have no archetypes *in rerum natura*. Locke's reply is energetically defiant. What, he asks, does the name matter so long as the "idea" content remains the same? Surely it matters not at all, because —

no more than (in mathematics) there would be a disturbance in the demonstration, or a change in the properties of figures and their relations one to another, if a man should make a triangle with four corners, or a trapezium with four right angles; that is, in plain English, change the names of the figures, and call that by one name which mathematicians call ordinarily by another.

And, in still plainer English:

If changelings may be supposed something between man and beast, pray what are they? I answer, changelings, which is as good a word to signify something different from the signification of man or beast, as the names man and beast are to have significations different one from the other.⁶

If he is asked what is to be the fate of a changeling after death, he replies (as Ockham, the progenitor of seventeenth-century fideism, would have replied) that he is content to leave that decision to God. His nominalism, in other words, is no threat to the Christian faith; and it is an excellent corrective to Peri-

⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.4.9, 4.14.

patetic essentialism, which is false as philosophy and unprofitable to the main concerns of men.

Locke's determination to appear as metaphysically orthodox as the next man, while firmly standing by his nominalist analysis of the Mixed Modes, is interestingly revealed in the careful wording of his proposal to make ethics into a demonstrative science:

Upon this ground it is that I am bold to think that morality is capable of demonstration, as well as mathematics; since the precise real essence of the things moral words stand for may be perfectly known; and so the congruity and incongruity of the things themselves be certainly discovered; in which consists perfect knowledge.⁷

With deliberate circumspection, Locke says that the real essence of our moral ideas ("mixed modes") is identical with their nominal essence. This is why to know the nominal essence is to know the real essence ("the precise real essence of the things moral words stand for may be perfectly known"); to know the real essence is to possess reality; and this is to satisfy the traditional end of metaphysical enquiry. The position appears to be impeccably Christian-realist and non-ideist. But what is delicately suppressed (one need not suppose disingenuously) is one crucial step in the argument: that to say the real essence and nominal essence of a moral idea are identical, is the same as to say that it has *only* a (knowable) nominal essence and no (unknowable) real essence at all; in other words, that, like all the Mixed Modes, its reality is solely in the idea or concept plus the name. And though Locke may say that he is seeking to discover "the congruity and incongruity of the *things* [real essences] themselves . . . in which consists perfect knowledge", he is actually talking about the "agreement and disagreement" ("congruity and incongruity") of the ideas and their names: that is, about the internal coherence of the system of moral ideas plus names ("nominal essences") forming his ethical calculus, without reference to anything *in rerum natura*.

Locke's discussion of Maxims, meaning "analytic" propositions, is as radically nominalist as his account of Mixed Modes; and it is also historically significant in anticipating Kant's famous classification of propositions. He distinguishes between the axioms ("maxims") of logic and those of mathematics in much the same way as Kant. The axioms of logic (for example, "the whole is equal to the sum of its parts") are definitions of the meanings of words:

⁷ *Ibid.*, III.11.16.

What more is contained in that maxim [the whole is equal to all its parts] than what the signification of the word *totum*, or the whole, does of itself import?⁸

The predicate ("all its parts") is "contained in" the subject ("the whole"), because the proposition is purely a declaration of the way we propose to use the word designating the subject. Therefore, Locke contends, such propositions are "trifling" and "un-instructive", as are all propositions that are merely "analytically" true. The axioms or basic definitions of mathematics, on the other hand, are instructive and not trifling. A proposition like "the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles", is true *a priori* in so far as it is derived by necessary consequences from the definition of the word "triangle". But it is *a priori* "synthetic", in that it tells us something new, and thus something more than the definition contains; and in this sense it is "instructive".

Locke's account of Maxims is in fact very close to Sergeant's Aristotelian logical-nominalist analysis of identical propositions. But they are radically at variance in their assessment of the value as knowledge of these propositions, Sergeant insisting that logical maxims and all identical propositions are as "instructive" as the axioms and definitions of mathematics.

3. REAL AND NOMINAL ESSENCE

Locke's most persistent predicament, I have suggested, arises from his effort to mix a half-hearted realism with his Ockhamist nominalism. The predicament appears very clearly in his distinction between real and nominal essence, which is central to his doctrine of Substance, and also invades his nominalist doctrine of Mixed Modes.

The Lockean distinction between real essence and nominal essence, rests upon the Cartesian-corpuscularian separation of the so-called primary and secondary qualities of bodies. It is therefore tied up, not only with a particular theory of physics, but also with the mechanistic metaphysic on which in the seventeenth century that physical theory depended. What this means is, that the real-nominal antithesis in Locke's account of the category substance, historically presupposes the metaphysical assumptions of the corpuscularian physics: chiefly, that the "real" is that which is amenable to geometrical analysis—reducible, that is, to propositions expressing relations of quantity; and that everything that cannot be so expressed is in some sense illusory (though often

⁸ *Ibid.*, IV.7.11.

useful or even indispensable for the practical conduct of life). The primary qualities, then, are the reality of substance, the "cause" of the secondary qualities, the somewhat-I-know-not-what "supporting" the secondary qualities. But the primary qualities are inaccessible to the senses: therefore they are by their nature unknowable; and being the real essence of substance, their unknowability makes the real essence of substance by its nature unknowable. Consequently, we can talk intelligibly only about the nominal essence of substance: that is, about the co-existent secondary qualities—which *are* accessible to the senses—plus the name we assign to our complex "idea" of them.

These secondary qualities "co-exist in nature" and are the "effect" of the hidden primary qualities; and we call this essence "nominal", because it is the name that determines, i.e. fixes and limits, the content of the "idea" it represents. But we can never *know* whether our idea of the secondary qualities corresponds to any real existent; we can only believe that it is in some unknowable way related to the primary qualities which form "the insensible constitution of things".⁹

As an essay in metaphysics, this account will satisfy no one—neither the metaphysical realist, nor nominalist, nor conceptualist. The realism of the somewhat-I-know-not-what sub-stratum will seem to the thoroughgoing realist to be hardly more than a pious gesture. The vaguely "mentalist" definition of nominal essence, which leaves undefined the crucial term "idea", will leave the conceptualist unsatisfied. *Why*, he will ask, is there a correspondence between the objects of perception (the co-existent secondary qualities), and our "complex ideas" of them? How does Locke *explain* that correspondence? The answer is that Locke does not explain it: he merely asserts it. And the Ockhamist nominalist who believes that ideas (*ens rationes*) are creations of the mind, totally separate and distinct from the sensible particulars that constitute reality, will be bound to reject Locke's unsuccessful effort to force a connection between them.

How unsatisfactory the Aristotelian realist finds Locke's doctrine, John Sergeant tells us with his customary vigour and copiousness in *Solid Philosophy Asserted*.

4. LOCKE ON LANGUAGE

The celebrated statements in Book III of the *Essay* that Sergeant fastens on, in which Locke is intent on exposing afresh the

⁹ *Ibid.*, III.11.15–20.

Baconian Idols of the Market-place, are in fact a propaedeutic to Locke's philosophy of language. The spirit of Francis Bacon and the Baconians of the Royal Society speaks, for instance, in a statement such as this: "And here I desire it may be considered, and carefully examined, whether the greatest part of the disputes in the world are not merely verbal and about the signification of words". It speaks again in the famous solution Locke proposes to the learned physicians who are at a loss to decide whether any "liquor" passed through the filaments of the nerves. Having been "used to suspect that the greatest part of disputes were more about the signification of words, than a real difference in the conception of things", Locke is able to show that their problem is nothing but the difficulty of agreeing about the meaning of the word "liquor".¹⁰

But Locke goes beyond Bacon and the Baconians, and draws close to the Hobbesian nominalism of "Truth, and a true proposition, is all one", in a declaration such as the following:

When . . . I began to examine the extent and certainty of our knowledge, I found it had so near a connexion with words, that, unless their force and manner of signification were first well observed, there could be very little said clearly and pertinently concerning knowledge; which *being conversant about truth, had constantly to do with propositions*. And though it terminated in things, yet it was for the most part *so much by the intervention of words, that they seemed scarce separable from our general knowledge*.¹¹

This is the insight central to Locke's view of the place of language in philosophy; and it is intimately connected with his doctrine of Ideas, which is the heart of his theory of knowledge. Its "sceptical" implications are not lost on Sergeant, who finds in it a further decisive proof of the inadequacies of the ideist philosophy.

5. SERGEANT ON IDEISM

The special targets of Sergeant's attack are Locke's doctrine of mixed modes, in which he sees Locke's ideism at work in its most extreme form; the distinction between real essence and nominal essence, which Sergeant treats as an elementary contradiction in terms; and Locke's philosophy of language. The overtopping target is, of course, the ideism itself, to which he returns again and again to expose its internal contradictions and other shortcomings, and to draw the moral each time, that he who repudiates the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, III.11.7, 9.16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, III.9.21 (my emphases).

"solid philosophy" of Aristotle is doomed to flounder helplessly in a morass of error and confusion.

Sergeant by no means dismisses everything in Locke's system. On the contrary, he finds in it much that is worthy of praise. For example, he is generous enough (or simple-minded enough) to take Locke's vestigial metaphysical realism at its face value, lauding it as a great saving grace and using it as a stick with which to beat the Cartesians, whose ideism verging on solipsism he regards as much more far gone than Locke's:

Mr. Locke's way has far more of Nature in it, and consequently is more Solid than the Cartesian; in regard he holds all our Ideas are originally taken from the Outward Objects, either immediately, as to his Simple Ideas; or mediately, as to those which are compounded of them by the Soul.¹²

Similarly, in his comments on Locke's doctrine of Substance, he recognises the commendable intellectual motive that leads "Mr L" to view Substance as a something-we-know-not-what. But he cannot but deplore its sceptical implications: he is "heartily griev'd", he says, "to see the greatest Wits [like Locke], for want of True Logick, and through their not lighting on the right way of Philosophising, lay Grounds for Scepticism to the utter Subversion of all Science; and this not designedly, but with good Intentions and out of their Sincerity and Care not to affirm more than they know."¹³ He frequently refers to Locke as "this Acute Author", or "this Great Man"; and from time to time, when he is particularly pleased to find himself in agreement with Locke, he allows himself a typical congratulatory effusion on his own and Locke's acuteness, which, he claims, is shared by no other contemporary philosopher known to him.

However, there is nothing congratulatory or conciliatory about his tone when he gets down to the business of exposing the great weak spots in Locke's system. One of the weakest is Locke's doctrine of Simple Ideas. Though Sergeant applauds Locke's realist aspiration in his account of his Simple Ideas, he easily perceives how it contradicts Locke's basic ideism:

He alledges the Agreement or Conformity of the Thing with his Simple Ideas. And I reply that he cannot by the Principles of the Ideists shew that the Things do agree or disagree with his Simple Ideas at all . . . Ere he can know that the Representation and the Thing represented do agree, Common Sense tells us, he must have both the Idea and the Thing in his Comparing Power, that is, in

¹² *Solid Philosophy*, p. 170.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

his Mind; that so he may take a View of both of them, and consider them in order to one another, and by doing this, see whether one does truly resemble the other, or no.¹⁴

Sergeant has already repeatedly explained in *Solid Philosophy* that only the Aristotelian conceptualist realism and doctrine of “considerabilities” can ensure that a man will have “both the Idea and the Thing in his Comparing Power, that is, his Mind”; and he returns to this crucial point in his comments on Locke’s Complex Ideas, which, according to Locke, are wholly and solely creations of the human mind, with no knowable archetype *in rerum natura*. For Sergeant, this doctrine undermines the foundation of all philosophy, which is the knowledge of “things”, not of ideas or conceptions severed from things; and he sums up his fundamental divergence from the ideists in these terms:

Let them [the ideists] turn which way they will, either the Thing is never brought into the Knowledge, or the Mind, and then it can never be known; or it is brought thither, and then it must be *there*, which is our Position, and deny’d by the Ideists.¹⁵

His final indictment of Locke’s Mixed Modes is that they are a colossal muddle, lacking all internal coherence: “His Mixt Ideas . . . have so Ragged, Shatter’d, and Dishevell’d an Appearance that ’tis hard to determine which of his Simple Ideas that makes this Mixture . . . is to be First, Second, Third &c. So that the Definitions of his Ideas do more resemble a Confused Heap than a Regular Building.”¹⁶

In his critique of Locke’s analysis of Maxims, Sergeant is at cross-purposes with Locke about their epistemological status and value. So far from being “uninstructive”, Sergeant contends, they are presupposed (“foreknown, or (at least) foregranted”) in every dispute; and though the disputants may be unconscious of it, the Maxims supply the common ground between them, without which rational discourse is impossible. Sergeant throws in some homely but forceful images to make his point:

His [Locke’s] Acute Wit will find, upon Reflexion, that it is impossible we can make an Ordinary, much less any Speculative, Discourse, but the Discourers¹⁷ must agree in something that is either *Foreknown*, or (at least) *Foregranted*; for, if the two Disputants disagree in *all* their Principles and Grounds, and one of them still

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁷ Locke underlines the word “Discourers”, and comments in the margin: “He means Disputants, but Mr L. speaks not of Disputation but knowledg.” (p. 368)

denies ALL the other *affirms*, 'tis impossible they should Discourse together *at all*.

These two Maxims . . . are of such most Necessary and Universal Usefulness that, without them, we could neither *judge, discourse, nor act*. Indeed, these Maxims lie retruse in the most Inmost Recesses of our Judging or Intellective Power, and make not their Appearance in Formal Propositions, but only when we have occasion to produce them; tho' they are still *there* all the while, and guide all our Thoughts steadily, nay, all our Actions too. In the same manner as when a Musician plays a careless Voluntary upon a Harpsichord, he guides himself all along by the Rules of Musick lodg'd in his Mind; tho', they being now *familiar* to him, he is not so Sensible of those Rules as he was when he first learn'd them.

A Country Butcher loses his knife, and looks all about for it, in which case 'tis usual for such Fellows to say, as the Motive for his continuing to seek it, *I am sure it must be somewhere or other*. By which rude Saying 'tis evident, that he guides himself all the while by this foreknown General Maxim, *Every particular Body in the world must be in some place*. For had he not had the knowledge of this Maxim beforehand, that is, did he think it were possible it should be *no where, or in no place*, he would never have taken such Pains to look for it.¹⁸

On Locke's key distinction between "nominal essence" and "real essence", Sergeant is particularly scathing. He speaks of "that Catachresis of Nominal Essences", treating it as another absurd consequence of Locke's ideism: for "what have Names or Words, which are nothing but Articulate Air, or Figur'd Ink (excepting what is Annexed to them by our Minds) to do with the Intrinsic Natures of Things that they should be one Sort or Kind of Essences?"¹⁹ Sergeant is right, of course, to dismiss "nominal essence" as an abuse of terms ("catachresis"), pointing to a radical contradiction in Locke's system. If Locke is using "essence" in its traditional Aristotelian-scholastic sense (and he surely is), "nominal essence" is indeed an elementary contradiction in terms. Anything that is an "essence" in this sense is by definition "real", not (merely) "nominal"; anything that is "nominal" cannot be an "essence"; and, as Sergeant says, how can "names or words" (i.e. the nominal), intelligibly be called "one sort or kind of essence"? What Sergeant is saying, in short, is that Locke's distinction between real essences and nominal essences, upon which his doctrine of substance turns, is logically *and* metaphysically untenable. It is logically untenable, because the term "nominal essence" is self-contradictory, and the term "real essence" a

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 368–370.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

tautology (since an “essence” is by definition “real”); and it is metaphysically untenable for the reasons mentioned in my sketch of Locke’s doctrine—that it will satisfy neither the consistent metaphysical realist like Sergeant, nor the consistent metaphysical nominalist or conceptualist.

6. SERGEANT ON LANGUAGE

Sergeant declares himself frankly at a loss to understand the very object of Locke’s enterprise in Book III of the *Essay*. What, he asks, can Locke mean by insisting that “a doctrine of signs” is the basis of any theory of knowledge, when everyone knows that philosophy is the knowledge of *things*; and “to make the Doctrine of Words to be a science, or part of Philosophy, is to make Philosophy *Wordish*”. On the same ground, he objects vehemently to Locke’s appearing to reduce logic to a doctrine of signs:

It is a great Injury to that Excellent and most Useful Science, Logick, which treats of the Operations of our Understanding, and of the way how to manage them, to make it nothing but the Doctrine of Signes or Words; and to pretend it has its name thence . . . I am sure [*logos*] is never found to signify the Art or Doctrine of WORDS but the art of Discoursing or Reasoning.²⁰

In other words, logic *is* language (“discourse”); but neither logic nor language is merely a system of signs.

Nor does Sergeant understand what Locke means by saying that “the secret and unobserved references” of words are a fundamental source of philosophical confusion.²¹ What “secret references” can there be if, as every Aristotelian knows, the meanings of words are “by institution” and *ad placitum*, and all that is required is “to avoid equivocalness” when instituting the correct (i.e. received) usages of words? Adapting Digby’s distinction between the “proper” (natural) language of the vulgar and the “metaphorical” (specialised) language of the learned, Sergeant then enunciates the two (and only two) conditions required to resolve all Locke’s difficulties about language. These are—(1) to assign univocal meanings to our words; and, at the same time, (2) to make sure of the conformity of the word with the con-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 454, 456. Cp. J.H. Randall in his *Aristotle* (p.6): “To understand the world of Greece means for Aristotle an understanding of language, of discourse, of *logos*, as the instrument of thinking and knowing . . . ‘Discourse’ and ‘reason’ are one and the same thing—in Greek they are designated by one and the same word, *logos* . . . ‘Logic’—Aristotle’s own term is ‘analytics’—is the art of discourse, of using language, the Greek language.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

ception, and thus of its conformity with the thing. This is the task that the vulgar and the learned (whom Sergeant calls "artists") divide between them:

For all our Words do either signify our Natural Notions, which are common to all Mankind, whose meaning therefore is to be taken from the Usage of the Vulgar; or else Artificial ones, invented by Artists to express the Notions they are conversant about.

And he goes on: "All words are indeed *Ad placitum*; but 'tis Mankind that must please agree in their Signification; nor must they be at the *Beneplacitum* of Particular Men, or Private Authors"—but, presumably, of the society as a whole.²²

Sergeant returns to his argument with Locke:

This Acute Author fancies Unintelligible Mysteries in the Annexing Words to his Ideas . . . whereas my weak Speculation . . . cannot discern any Annexion other than this, that Men have agreed that such Words shall signify such and such Things or Notions; all other Annexion being Unaccountable.²³

On this Locke comments curtly in the margin of his copy of *Solid Philosophy*: "They [men] have either not agreed or do not keep to the agreement"; intimating that Sergeant has totally misconceived the problem, and also perhaps that Sergeant's easy optimism is working on his nerves.²⁴

There is more to come on these lines to try Locke's patience. Having elaborated on the prerogative of the vulgar to lay down the "proper" meanings of words, Sergeant reiterates his position about the unimportance of a doctrine of words:

By their Imposing, Accepting, or Using them [words] in such a Sense, they [the vulgar] have stamp'd upon them their Proper Signification, and given it to be Sterling and Current . . . Nor can I see (care being taken to avoid Equivocalness) what further Inspection into the Nature of Words can be needful for a Philosopher . . . In this Designation, Agreement and Usage of the Word, and only in this, consists all the Connexion or Tying of Ideas to the Words, and those Secret References of the former to the other of which Mr Locke speaks so often in his Second Chapter and other places.²⁵

²² *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

²⁴ Locke's marginal comments on *Solid Philosophy* have been discussed at length by John W. Yolton in his article "Locke's unpublished marginal replies to John Sergeant", in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* xii (1951), pp. 528–559. Mr Yolton's assessment of Sergeant's strictures and Locke's replies differs widely from mine. In my view, Sergeant's criticisms are far more radical and undermining to Locke's system than Mr Yolton allows, and Locke's replies correspondingly less convincing and less conclusive than Mr Yolton appears to find them.

²⁵ *Solid Philosophy*, pp. 282–283.

This appears to reinforce Locke's suspicion that Sergeant does not understand what he is talking about and his disdain of Sergeant's vulgar-versus-learned distinction: "This if it has any meaning", Locke comments in another marginal note (on page 264), "is that we should take the signification of our words from one sort of men and joyn them by the direction of others; whereas their signification is the only rule and measure of joyning them." Locke's criticism, however, is unjust. For Sergeant does say that "their signification is the only rule and measure of joining them", when he insists that "in this Designation, Agreement, and Usage of the Word, and only in this, consists all the Connexion or Tying of Ideas to the Words": meaning, that "all the Connexion or Tying of Ideas to Words" is in the *ad placitum* imposition of meaning, and in this alone; that the relation of word to idea is declared in its very meaning (signification, usage); and that the problem, if it is a problem, of the relation of word to idea, is identical with the problem of its meaning or signification or usage. This is surely close enough to Locke's quasi-nominalist account of language and meaning to be no cause for quarrel between them. And since Sergeant has declared the problem of assigning meanings to words to be no real problem (as long as we remember "to avoid equivocalness"), the same must hold for Locke's supposedly "secret and unobserved references of words to ideas": this, too, can be no real problem.

It soon appears, however, that there is a problem after all. It arises from reflecting on what happens in the actual language practices of the learned "artists". They, says Sergeant (again following Digby), "have the Prerogative of Coining their own Words, and of Affixing to them what signification they please".²⁶ Yet he cannot fail to observe that, in spite of this freedom to assign meaning *ad placitum*, the "artists" do often disagree among themselves about the meanings of words; inviting the question, "How is one to explain this phenomenon of disagreement?" For Locke this is, of course, the key problem, which Sergeant does implicitly recognise as a problem; and the solution each proposes, decisively exposes the foundations of their widely differing views of the place of language in philosophy. It shows that the difference springs from their radically divergent metaphysical positions. Sergeant's Aristotelian metaphysical realism combines with his Aristotelian logical nominalism to yield one answer;

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

Locke's modern "ideism", an imperfect mixture of logical and metaphysical nominalism, yields another.

Locke's answer would run something like this. Although imposition of names is *ad placitum*, the "artists" nevertheless disagree—(a) because they are, *without knowing it*, using different words to signify the same idea; or (b) because they are without knowing it using the same word for different ideas; or (c) because the word they use is ill-defined: that is to say, its reference is "secret" or "obscure", in that it appears to signify one idea or group of ideas but, again without the artists' knowing it, in fact signifies quite another. The root of the trouble for Locke is, always, that *they do not know* how they are in fact using the word. This is why he continually reverts to the phrase "the secret and unobserved references" of words to ideas that Sergeant finds so puzzling: the reference of their words are secret and unobserved *to the users themselves*. So when Sergeant remarks, in casual parenthesis, "Nor can I see (care being taken to avoid equivocalness)"—that is, care being taken to avoid secret and unobserved references of words to ideas—"what further inspection into the nature of words is useful to a philosopher", he in effect assumes as given, what for Locke is the very crux of the practical problem of language. This convicts him in Locke's eyes of an intolerable shallowness, or obtuseness, or both; and it is doubtless the casualness of that parenthesis that provokes Locke to the sarcastic marginal comment, "Without doubt he that knows what he makes the word man stand for knows what he makes it stand for".²⁷

Locke on his side, however, fails to understand the source of Sergeant's buoyant optimism about the language problem: that it is rationally grounded in, and entirely consistent with, the conceptualist-realism of his Aristotelian metaphysic, and not merely (as Locke appears to think) another example of Sergeant's tiresome "enthusiasm".

Sergeant's argument, resting on his doctrine of considerabilities, runs as follows. An idea (notion, conception) is the thing itself viewed under one particular considerability. The thing itself is single, unique, and unalterably fixed in its essence *in rerum natura*. A true idea or conception of the thing, is the thing itself viewed under that considerability, and is therefore also single, unique, and unalterably fixed. Since there is a true idea or conception

²⁷ Locke's comment here, on p. 360, is actually made at a later stage of Sergeant's argument, on his analysis of the definition of man as a rational animal, which is an extended statement of the offending injunction to "avoid equivocalness".

of every thing, the effort of the “artists” in executing their appointed task of imposing names on their “reflex notions”, is to discover those true ideas *by introspection*, and to assign univocal names to them.

The crux of the difference between Sergeant’s view and Locke’s is plain. Taking his stand on his metaphysical conceptualist-realism, Sergeant puts all the emphasis on the discovering of the *true* ideas of things, which he believes to be discoverable, because their discoverability is logically guaranteed by the doctrine of considerabilities. Locke’s emphasis, owing to his basically nominalist epistemology, is on the assigning of univocal names to ideas, with no consistent reference to the truth of the ideas. In his discussion of Simple Ideas, Locke does indeed show a realist concern with the relation of idea to thing, and receives Sergeant’s applause for it. But though he affirms a correspondence of “simple idea” with thing, the affirmation is wholly arbitrary and *ad hoc*, because he has no systematic epistemological theory, such as the doctrine of considerabilities, to support it. Therefore, when Locke is asked to account for the phenomenon of disagreement among Sergeant’s “artists”, he replies that it is due to “the secret and unobserved references” of words to ideas—that is, to the sheer *difficulty* of “avoiding equivocalness”. This difficulty in turn, Locke argues, is due to an imperfect technique of signification; and he accordingly proposes, as an instance of what may be done to reduce “equivocalness” by a more perfect technique of signification, his calculus for ethics, in which every ethical term we habitually use has *by agreement* of the cognoscenti been assigned a single univocal meaning.²⁸

When Sergeant is asked how *he* accounts for the absence of agreement about the meanings of words among the “artists”, he answers that it is due to their unequal powers of introspection. The remedy against equivocalness is therefore better introspection; and those artists who introspect best (the “best Reflectors”) are best qualified to fix the meanings of the “terms of art”, because they will be most firmly in possession of the true idea (notion, conception) of the thing, and thus of the thing itself. In Sergeant’s words:

The Notion that Art [i.e. logic] makes use of, being wholly built on the manner of Existing the Thing has in our Understanding, which none but Steady, Solid and Acute Reflectors can perfectly discern; hence those Reflex Notions, and consequently the Names which are to signifie them, become liable to Ambiguity; which has,

²⁸ *Essay*, III.4, III.11.15–16.

doubtless, been the Occasion of many fruitless Contests; which end (if they ever end at all) in Word-Skirmishes.

Again:

Yet it will not be hard to prevent or avoid all Mistake even in these, if we but attend heedfully to the Manners by which those things exist in our minds, and take the Sense of those Words from the ablest Artists, or best Reflecters.²⁹

Sergeant's confidence that the remedy will be efficacious is derived, as we have seen, from the doctrine of considerabilities, which gives the assurance that "a clear and distinct notion" is always the thing itself "as it is in the mind". By the same doctrine, univocal meaning is no more than a sign that the notion *is* thus clear and distinct; therefore that it *is* the thing "as it is in the mind"; and therefore that it is a *true* notion. This is the rationale of Sergeant's indifference to the mere mechanics of signification that Locke found so irritating. It is stated repeatedly in his works, starting with the earliest:

Seeing the Meaning of a Word includes in itself the Nature of the Thing as signified by that Word, in regard it could not mean that Thing unless it also meant it of such a Nature which constitutes that Thing, so 'tis plain that the Meaning of the Word once known perfectly, the Nature of the Thing, as signify'd by that Word, must be known likewise . . . The perfect knowledge, then, of the Meaning of the Words affords us the certain solution of all questions whether Affirmative or Negative, and is the most Compendious way to settle all Controversies.³⁰

Consequently:

Let Logicians but take care that the words be Univocal and not Equivocal, or double-sensed, and all else that can be consider'd to belong to Truth is to be look'd for in the Mind, and can be nowhere else.³¹

So Sergeant's polemic against Locke's "doctrine of signs" is conducted from the standpoint of his own theory of language, which is firmly grounded in his reading of Aristotle's metaphysics. For Sergeant, no fruitful philosophical speculation is possible on any other ground, and, he intimates again, it is because Locke has rejected this one solid foundation of all true philosophy that his enquiries into language are bound to be misdirected and ultimately sterile. He admires and applauds Locke's campaign against obscurity, ambiguity, and merely verbal disputation; but he does wish that Locke "could as well give us an account that

²⁹ *Solid Philosophy*, pp. 283, 284.

³⁰ *Sure-Footing*, pp. 1-2. For other statements, see *Non Ultra*, pp. 8-12, and *Faith Vindicated*, p. 51.

³¹ *Solid Philosophy*, p. 358.

the Ideas he and others speak of are the Thing itself, inadequately conceiv'd by us, and not meer Representations of it: for this done, we might hope for true Philosophy from the Principles of the Ideists". He speaks as a true Aristotelian again when, more sharply, he declares that "the Third Book [of Locke's *Essay*] concerning Words seems Unnecessary"; that he is amazed "this Great Man can imagine that in our more Complex Ideas we put the Name for the Idea itself [i.e. with no reference to the thing]; for then that Name would signify Nothing at all"; that "the *Consequences of Sounds*, abstracted from our Notions, is very Amusing and utterly Unintelligible".³²

Perhaps to offset the severity of these comments, Sergeant ends with a friendly suggestion: that Locke would have been better employed in clearing the philosophical field of some of its existing linguistic confusions—what modern analytical philosophy calls "systematically misleading expressions". If Locke had "rather thought fit to take particular Notice of those Words which have been Abus'd or Misaccepted by Trivial Philosophers; and had clear'd their Ambiguity, rectify'd their Impropriety, and Substituted (if need be) other more Proper in their stead", this, Sergeant concludes, "must certainly have had a great Influence upon the Advancement of Science".³³

To adjudicate between these high-powered doctrines of language, Locke's and Sergeant's, is no part of my task; yet the elucidation I have attempted would remain incomplete if I did not mention at least their most obvious logical flaws. The fatal gap in Sergeant's doctrine stares one in the face. How does he know which clear and distinct ideas *are* "the thing as it is in the mind", and which are not? In other words, by what criterion does he distinguish between clear and distinct ideas that are *true* and those that, in his favourite phrase, are merely "fanciful"? He does, of course, propose a criterion: it is to be found in the "steady, solid, and acute reflecters", whose reflections are the paradigm and standard of true ideas. But the criterion rests on a perfectly circular argument. What is a true (not fanciful) clear and distinct idea? Answer: the clear and distinct ideas in the mind of an acute reflecter. And what is an acute reflecter? He whose mind is replete with true (not fanciful) clear and distinct ideas. There is

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 286, 287, 356, 438. The last quotation is Sergeant's paraphrase of Locke's proposition that "inferences or Consequences in *Words* are a great part of the Reason, though the Agreement or Disagreement of Ideas be the Principal". (Quoted *Solid Philosophy*, p. 437, from Locke, *Essay*, IV.17.18.)

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

nothing in Sergeant's system to break this circle—which leaves his whole doctrine, and *a fortiori* his theory of language, with a huge begged question hanging over it. Perhaps the real answer is supplied by Hobbes, when he proclaims the introspective power of the human mind to be the only final, irreducible ground and guarantee of truth. "If you will be a philosopher in good earnest", he had said, "let your reason move upon the deep of your own cogitations and experience"; implying, that what the philosophic mind discovers in the deep of its own cogitations and experience is ultimately the only truth we know. And in the Introduction to *Leviathan*, he answers the momentous question, "How can I prove the doctrine of *Leviathan* to be true?" by declaring introspection to be both the sole instrument and the sole criterion of verification. "When I shall have set down my own reading orderly and perspicuously", he writes—meaning, my own interpretation ("reading") of my own experience, set down in clear and distinct ideas ("perspicuously") forming a coherent ("orderly") system:

When I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be only to consider, if he also find not the same in himself. For this kind of doctrine admitteth no other demonstration.³⁴

Sergeant, of course, believes in the introspective power of his "acute reflecters" as the one means of arriving at true ideas. But he does not recognise introspection as the ultimate *criterion* of verification presupposed by his epistemology—for lack, it seems, of the soaring power of generalisation of a Hobbes, or (to change the metaphor) the power of penetrating to the buried roots of one's own philosophical assumptions and presuppositions. And this perhaps is another measure of the difference between a master philosopher like Hobbes, and a superior journeyman like Sergeant.

But, as we have seen, the journeyman does well enough in putting his finger on some of the fundamental weaknesses of his adversary's doctrine; proving that, like most philosophers, he is better at spotting the mote in the other man's eye than in his own. What Sergeant has discerned, though without formulating it in these terms, is what I called the uneasy co-existence in Locke's system of a half-hearted, mainly pietistic realism with an incomplete and sometimes evasive nominalism; and for this distinctive Lockean mixture, Sergeant's "ideism" is not at all a bad term. In his polemical battles with the Anglican bishops, Sergeant gives further impressive proof of his keen tracker's nose for catching the scent of contemporary "ideism", wherever it may lie concealed.

³⁴ *Leviathan*, Introduction, p. 6.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SERGEANT AND THE ANGLICAN BISHOPS

There was nothing timid or diffident about John Sergeant's choice of the Anglican divines with whom to do battle for the honour of the Catholic rule of faith and the mortification of all Anglican theology. He singled out the most famous and formidable of them: John Bramhall (1594–1663), Bishop of Derry, afterwards Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland; Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667), Bishop of Down and Connor, who preached a celebrated funeral sermon on Archbishop Bramhall; John Tillotson (1630–1694), Dean of St Paul's from 1688, and Archbishop of Canterbury from 1691 to 1694; and Edward Stillingfleet (1635–1699), Bishop of Worcester from 1689.

In his *Literary Life*, and in the Preface to *Reason against Rallery*, Sergeant with typical zest recounts the stir created in the Anglican world by his first major polemical treatise, *Sure-footing in Christianity*, published in 1665 and reprinted the same year. Leading Anglican ecclesiastics, says Sergeant, appealed to Chancellor Hyde for the suppression of the book and its author, causing him to suffer persecution for some two years. Nevertheless, the book was read by Bishop Russell and the King, who both commended it as "a shrewd piece" which "struck at the root of the Reformation", and suggested that "the ablest men" of the Protestant party be engaged to answer it. Whereupon a kind of committee was formed, consisting of Bishops Wilkins, Tillotson, and Stillingfleet, along with Dr Bailes and Dr Craddock ("five choice persons", as Sergeant calls them), to decide upon the best method of answering the book. (All this, Sergeant adds, he learnt from one Mr Grant, a friend of Wilkins, but "privately more mine"). Subsequently a meeting was arranged between Sergeant and Wilkins and Tillotson, at which they argued the issue of "infallible" certainty *versus* "moral" certainty, and Sergeant gained a clear victory. The written replies to *Sure-footing* by Taylor, Tillotson and Stillingfleet were published soon afterwards.

What is Sergeant's bill of indictment against the bishops? The sins of commission and omission he charges them with all turn on their persistent, unforgivable violations of the "rules of art" in controversy. Their arguments, Sergeant contends, are intolerably sloppy, lacking in the most elementary rigour, loaded with

contradiction, full of loose ends. Their key terms are left undefined, or are defined so vaguely or confusedly or ambiguously that anything and everything may follow from them. They constantly shift their ground in an argument. They, heinously, change the question addressed to them, pretending the question they are answering is a re-statement of the original question, when it is no such thing. The irrelevance they are capable of is stupefying; and the criteria of truth they appeal to, especially in the vital matter of the Christian rule of faith, will not stand up to the most perfunctory logical scrutiny. In short, Sergeant is saying, their theology has not a logical leg to stand on, and they are either too stupid, or too self-deceived, or (most likely, since they are not fools) too dishonest to recognise this. These are the principal charges, delivered in just this no-pulling-of-punches tone and style. The impartial modern reader is likely to find it difficult to decide which he finds the more appealing—the remorseless logic with which the charges are developed, or the individual flavour and savour of the author's voice.

The individuality of the voice is everywhere apparent, and not least in the scornful irony with which Sergeant answers the ridicule ("raillery") of his adversaries. In one passage, he derides the grotesquely false parallels by which Tillotson endeavours to discredit his definitions and distinctions, suggesting that he might subject the concepts of Euclidian geometry to the same treatment with similar results:

Let us imagine that Euclid had been a Catholick. Dr. T might have preacht a Sermon or two full of Zeal against Witchcraft, and have produc't some *Fair Probabilities* to perswade the people that all Mathematicians were all meer Friar Bacons and absolute Conjurers, because they use to draw Circles and uncouth Figures which look like Magick.¹

In another passage, he tells Tillotson that he is the master of evasion, in a tone of mock-kindliness and with a great show of Christian sympathy for human weakness:

Let no man think I have a mean Opinion of Dr.T, but every one is not good at all things: some are good at proving, some at disproving, some at Shifting of the Question without either proving or disproving; every one in his way; and in his way I know no man living a greater Master, nor so great as the Dr.²

Sergeant's irony and invective reach a high point of indignation in his exchanges with Stillingfleet. Yet even when he most

¹ *Reason against Raillery*, pp. 163.

² *Ibid.*, p. 186.

wants to draw blood, his use of these weapons is always controlled by the supreme "concernment" of the end to which it is directed. He never forgets that his object is to establish the Christian rule of faith on the firmest, securest grounds; and this has the effect of mitigating the destructiveness of his irony, while in no way reducing its vigour and vivacity.

1. "RULES OF ART"

Sergeant owed his training in applied logic, or the art of controversy, to the standard curriculum of studies at the university. There are frequent direct references in his works, starting with the earliest, to the rules and procedures of the art of disputation, and the intellectual (and moral) enormity of failing to observe them. Thus, in *Schism Disarm'd* (1655): "Every boy that hath been but two years at Cambridge, knows he is first to establish his Premises firmly, ere he can claim any certainty of truth in his Conclusion." In *Schism Dispatch'd* (1657), he points out to his adversary, Dr Hammond, that he, as the adversary, has no business to "examine" the evidence for the Catholic position, because this is to violate the "rules of art" by putting himself in the position of the "respondent", the Catholic in that of the "opponent". Whereas, says Sergeant, "'tis evident we had the *possession*, and such a possession as could give us a title", and Dr Hammond's only legitimate task is therefore to disprove "by rigorous Evidence" the Catholic position, not to "examine" it. He makes a similar charge against Stillingfleet, that he "confounds the offices of disputant and defendant", and thereby "makes all regular [i.e. orderly] discourse impossible"; and when Stillingfleet, in another of his attacks, "pretends" to restate the question at issue between them but in fact changes it into a different question, Sergeant exposes his "shift" by showing that he has deliberately flouted the "rules of art".³ He does it in a crescendo of rhetorical questions that, besides being designed to make Stillingfleet hang his head for shame, also neatly summarise the most basic of the sacred "rules":

Was the Position as it lay in the terms of the Proposer *true*, and so to be *granted*? Why did he not grant it then? Was it *false*? Why did he not *deny* it? Was it *ambiguous*? Why did he not, the Proposer being present, desire him to explain it? No, neither. None of these plain and common Methods would please him. What then? He

³ John Sergeant, *Schism Disarm'd* (Paris, 1655), pp. 176–177; *Schism Dispatch'd*, p. 174; *First Catholick Letter*, p. 34.

would needs *change* the words of the Question in his Answer. And by what Rule? Was his Answer the *same* in *Sense* with the Question? If not, his Answer was no Answer to that Question, but the saying *another thing on his own head*.⁴

The question “And by what Rule?” is a telling illustration of what for Sergeant is the great shining virtue of the Peripatetic method—its insistence on absolute logical rigour in argument. If you cannot specify your “rules of transformation”, as we would call them today—the rules by which you may “transform” proposition A into proposition B and legitimately claim that B is a re-statement of A—you are forbidden to “change the words of the Question in [your] Answer”, and must keep strictly to the wording of the original question. It is a surprisingly modern doctrine, as its amenability to translation into the idiom of twentieth-century logic shows; leading one to wonder whether the methods of modern analytical philosophy are as new as they are often believed to be.

For John Sergeant, as for his mentor Thomas White, the “rules” of Peripatetic disputation are the only possible basis of a true “controversy-logicke”. Their historic source, he repeatedly reminds us, is the classic deductive view of knowledge of the *Posterior Analytics*:

Laying Principles and Deducing Legitimate Consequences . . . are all a Philosopher has to do.

What only should be expected from a Philosopher [is] Connected Sense, grounded on Principles.

'Tis the Perfection of our Reason to discourse Coherently or Connectedly.⁵

Sergeant's personal commitment to coherence and connectedness is vividly attested by periodic outbursts expressing his intense aversion to the incoherent and disconnected. “I must avow it, that I hate a Contradiction with all my heart”, he confides to the Indifferent Reader in the Dedication to *Schism Despatch'd*; and again in *Schism Disarm'd*: “I *hate* contradictions, though told me in never so pious a tone”. The depth of his commitment may be gauged from an autobiographical passage in a later work, in which he confesses that he had “above Twenty Years ago . . . begun to write a very Speculative Treatise shewing how to reduce every Truth to an Identical Proposition and every Errour to a Contradiction, which, I saw, lay hid at the Bottom of every Truth and

⁴ *Fifth Catholick Letter*, p. 44.

⁵ John Sergeant, *Raillery defeated by Calm Reason* (London, 1699), Dedicatory; p. 73.

Falshood".⁶ And his belief in "connectedness" as the only ultimate criterion of a valid discourse is further proved by his recognition that he himself, in spite of the excellence of his method, is nevertheless capable of falling into incoherence or inconsequence, and needs the help of his adversaries to "amend" his errors of reasoning. Thus, he entreats his adversary —

candidly [to] take my Book endways, and declare what in it is evident, and so to be allowed, what not; what Principles are well laid or Consequences right drawn and what are otherwise . . . [For] by this means it will be quickly discover'd whether or no you have overthrown my Discourse by showing it ill coherent, and how far 'tis faulty; that, if I cannot clear it to be connected, I may confess my fault and endeavour to amend it. For however I see my Grounds evident, yet I am far from judging myself Infallible in drawing my Consequences; though I see withal the method I take will not let me err much. Or, if I do, my Errour will be easily discoverable; because I go not about to cloud myself in words, but to speak out as plain as I can from the nature of the Thing.⁷

Sergeant knows exactly, it seems, what virtues to single out for praise in a philosophical method: that it reduces to a minimum the possibility of error; and, even more, that it ensures that error will be "easily discoverable", making it virtually self-corrective.

2. SCRIPTURE NO RULE OF FAITH

Armed for attack and defence by his invincible controversy-logicke, and again following Thomas White's lead, Sergeant sets out to expose or re-expose, the fatal inadequacy of the Anglican "rule of faith", Scripture. He had touched on the fringes of the problem in his argument about the Christian rule of faith in general, which, he had argued, was by definition infallible; and he now proceeds to the frontal assault. "Nothing [is] so disgraceful and opprobrious to faith, or so senseless in itself", he writes, "as to go about to establish its Basis, either upon reasons that are inconclusive, or on such an authority as is fallible, which leaves all Christian faith in a possibility to be a lying fiction for anything any man living knows". Accordingly, he proposes to end once and for all disputation "in a testimonial way": meaning, he explains, disputation in which "both sides alledge Citations out of the Fathers, and both gloss them to show them, or make them, favourable to their tenets". Instead, he will "take the way of reason (our discourse being *de previis ad fidem*) and . . . argue from in-

⁶ *Schism Disarm'd*, p. 266; *Non Ultra*, p. 38.

⁷ "Letter to his Answerer", appended to 2nd edn. of *Sure-footing*, pp. 17–18.

trinsical Mediums fetched *ex natura rei*, or the very Nature of the Subject".⁸ What he undertakes to prove from intrinsic mediums fetched *ex natura rei*, is that Scripture cannot be the rule of faith for Christians; and his extended argument further illuminates his rationalist doctrine of science, his use of the principle of identity as a means of "silencing the sceptic", and other elements of his "controversy-logicke".

He starts again by drawing the premises of his argument out of the meaning of his key terms, this being (we have already seen) what he means by arguing from "intrinsic mediums", or "the necessary connexion of terms". The word "rule" signifies "a thing which is able to regulate or guide him who uses it"; and the word "faith", in universal Christian usage, signifies that thing which brings all men to salvation. Therefore, a rule of faith must have the following three properties: (a) it must be "evident": that is, its meaning must be clear and unambiguous (as the meaning of Scripture is not) to "the senses" or "the understanding", according as it is intended to guide one or the other; (b) it must be "evident" to *all*—"even the Rudest Vulgar", who are not competent to engage in the refinements of Biblical criticism; and (c) it must be "self-evident"—that is, "certain in itself" (self-evidently true), or "establish't on secure grounds" (i.e. on *infallible* testimony) in order that those who follow it may be *incapable of erring*. "Thus much", Sergeant comments, "is evidently gathered out of the common Notion or Nature of a Rule; that is, out of the genuine and proper meaning of that single word".⁹

And thus much, it seems, is also enough for delivering his knock-out blow at Scripture as the Christian rule of faith. He uses the following argument:

A rule as it is a rule, that is, as it is "a thing . . . able to regulate or guide him who uses it", must in fact regulate or guide, else it is no rule; and as it is a rule of *faith*, it must in fact guide men to their salvation, else it is no rule of faith. Now, a rule that in fact regulates or guides men in the way to salvation renders those who follow that rule, and therefore that way, incapable of erring while they follow that rule and that way. But a rule of faith that renders those who follow it incapable of erring is infallible; for that is what the word "infallible" means, viz. to be, or to be the cause of being, "incapable of error".

Now comes the clinching argument: Since whatever is is, an infallible rule of faith is an infallible rule of faith: that is, it is itself

⁸ *Literary Life*, "Address", pp. 34–35.

⁹ *Sure-footing*, pp. 2–3.

and no other thing. But “to be itself and no other thing” means “to be single and indivisible, fixed and unvarying”. Therefore, where there is division and variation, as there is in the Protestant interpretation of Scripture, there cannot be an infallible rule of faith; and where there is no infallible rule of faith, there is no safeguard against error. But a rule that allows of error in those who follow it does not in fact regulate or guide, and is therefore no rule; that is, a fallible rule is no rule at all; and therefore Scripture is no rule at all.¹⁰

This is how Sergeant proves from “intrinsic mediums” and “the necessary connexion of terms” that the Anglican rule of faith is no rule of faith; and again the method is remarkably close to that of the Socratic dialectic. The proposition that enables him to deliver his knock-out blow is the definition of identity: that to say a thing is itself and no other thing is the same as to say that it is single and indivisible, fixed and unvarying. Sergeant’s immediate, contemporary source of this definition may well have been Bossuet’s famous treatise on “the variations of the Protestant churches”.¹¹ But ultimately it is derived from the Platonic-Aristotelian doctrine of essence, which includes the definition of identity (what it means for a thing to be itself and no other thing) that Sergeant adopts.

Sergeant claims that the definition is “self-evidently” true, i.e. necessarily implied or entailed by the “intrinsic” meaning of the component terms, and therefore ineluctable, indisputable, and so forth. But, of course, this is not true. It is perfectly possible to say, intelligibly and without self-contradiction, that the proposition, “a thing is itself and no other thing”, means “a thing is infinitely complex, infinitely variable, infinitely capable of division and re-division” and is nevertheless, in all its complexity, variability etc., “itself and no other thing”. This is in fact the kind of definition, in one form or another, that philosophers and poets subscribing to a diversity-in-unity principle (Coleridge and Blake, for example, to mention familiar instances) have proposed; and

¹⁰ This argument is developed in *Schism Dispatch’t*, pp. 98–99; *Sure-footing*, pp. 12–39; “Animadversions” appended to the 2nd. edition of *Sure-footing*, pp. 188–189; *Faith Vindicated*, pp. 54, 96–102; *Error non-plust*, pp. 57f., 202; *First Catholick Letter*, p. 25; *Second Catholick Letter*, pp. 7–36, 28–32; *Third Catholick Letter*, pp. 78–89; *Fifth Catholick Letter*, pp. 75, 80–81, 124, 166f.

¹¹ Jacques-Benigne Bossuet, *Histoire des Variations des Eglises protestantes*, published in 1688. Sergeant was for many years a close friend of Bossuet, was greatly admired by him, and dedicated to him his *Methodus Compendiosa* (Paris, 1674).

within their systems this definition of identity is no less "self-evident" than is Sergeant's in his.

Sergeant, however (again like Socrates in his arguments with Gorgias, Callicles, Thrasymachus, and the rest), has rightly discerned that his Anglican adversaries cannot without self-contradiction refuse assent to his definition of what it is for a thing to be itself and no other thing. As Christian theologians, they do subscribe to the Platonic-Aristotelian doctrine of essence, and therefore cannot but assent to the definition of identity derived from that doctrine. In other words, this crucial proposition in Sergeant's argument corresponds almost exactly to the proposition in a Socratic dialectical argument by which Socrates, the master of dialectic, finally proves to the adversary that the position he holds is self-contradictory, and therefore cannot be maintained; the point about this decisive proposition being that it expresses a truth accepted by both parties to the dispute, though the adversary does not know this until Socrates "traps" him into assenting to it. The definition of identity that Sergeant invokes is in fact accepted by Anglicans in common with Roman Catholics; so all Sergeant, the latter-day master of dialectic, has to do, is to force his Anglican adversaries to recognise this, and then show them the inescapable logical consequence of their assent—that their rule of faith (Scripture) is radically inconsistent with it, and therefore cannot be maintained.

In all his exchanges with the bishops Sergeant keeps a tenacious hold on this argument, refusing to relinquish a single step of it, drawing out its further implications as the need arises. Thus, when Stillingfleet attempts to refute it by distinguishing between a rule and the application of this rule, arguing that, for instance, "Men following the Rules of Arithmetic may mistake in casting up a Sum", Sergeant retorts with the question: "Can he [Stillingfleet] seriously think that a man who casts it up False does not *decline*, while he thus mistakes, from Arithmetical Rules?" In other words, to "follow" a rule *means* to make the *right* application of it: therefore, to fail to make the right application, i.e. to err, means that the rule has *not* been followed.¹²

He uses a similar argument when he is proclaiming the oral tradition of the Catholic Church to be the only true rule of faith. His friend Peter Gooden had defined "Traditionary Christians" as those who "believe the same today which they did yesterday and so up to the time of our Blessed Saviour". The definition

¹² *Fifth Catholic Letter*, p. 63.

had been challenged by the Anglicans, leading Sergeant to defend it, by the following argument:

Since Traditionary Christians are those who proceed upon Tradition, and Tradition signifies Immediate Delivery, it follows that unless they believe the same today which they did yesterday and so upwards, they cease to be Traditionary Christians, by proceeding not upon an Immediate but an Interrupted Delivery, or some other Principle. And so there is no denying this Proposition, but by affirming that Traditionary Christians are not Traditionary Christians.¹³

And to say “Traditionary Christians are not Traditionary Christians” is, of course, a violation of the principle of identity—the one necessary condition or co-implicate of rational discourse.

Stillingfleet attempts to refute Sergeant’s argument, by pointing to the fact that all the famous heretics (Arians, Pelagians, Nestorians, and so on) also claimed to be “traditionary Christians”: that is, they claimed to be following what they believed to be the true tradition of Christ, which, they contended, had been distorted and defiled by the historic Church. Sergeant’s reply is to invoke his definition of “tradition” as that which is “*immediately or uninterruptedly* delivered”, and to show that nothing more is needed to dispose of the heretics’ claim to the title of “traditionary Christians”. His argument takes up Stillingfleet’s charge that his proof (“demonstration”) is invalidated (“lost”) by the case of the historic heretics:

How is [my] Demonstration lost if many men err’d upon divers other accounts, so none err’d while they follow’d Tradition? Unless he [Stillingfleet] proves this, he establishes our Demonstrations by his shewing how multitudes err’d who were led by other Motives and by his not being able to produce so much as one Instance of any that err’d by adhering to It . . . He talks a little faintly of the Arians, Pelagians, Nestorians &c. not disowning Tradition. But does he hope to persuade any man of Sense those Upstarts durst ever go about to put out the eyes of the World by pretending their Heresies were deliver’d down as Christ’s doctrine by the Publick Testimony of the Church in their days, or out-face the present Church that she herself had taught them what she knew themselves had newly invented? Or would she have condemn’d them had they spoke her thoughts or follow’d her Doctrine? With what Sense can any of this be imagin’d? The Tradition, then, which they went upon was Citations of some former Authors which they misunderstood (the very Method Dr. Stillingfleet and his fellow-Quoters take nowadays) or else the Judgment of a few Foregoers; of whom some might speak ambiguously, others perhaps hanker’d after their Heresy.¹⁴

¹³ *First Catholick Letter*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Fifth Catholick Letter*, pp. 142–143.

Returning to the Anglican rule of faith, Sergeant takes issue with the "moral certainty" that the bishops claim for it. This so-called moral certainty, Sergeant repeatedly declares, is a phrase self-contradictory and therefore nonsensical:

To say I am morally certain of a Thing is in rigour, the same Nonsense as it is to say I am uncertainly Certain or (which is consequent to it) I ignorantly know, I suspendingly or hoveringly assent, I diffidently believe or can probably demonstrate. Wherefore, when in common speech men use to say they are morally certain, 'tis a catachrestical phrase, and signifies only that the thing is highly likely, or that they incline strongly to think 'tis true.¹⁵

The vehemence of the tone betrays Sergeant's passionate dislike of this kind of "nonsense" or non-sense. He openly declares it in his *Fifth Catholick Letter* (p. 57): "I must confess I hate such nonsense as to say *I am perfectly certain of a thing yet peradventure I am deceived*". One remembers what he had said about hating "contradiction", no matter how pious, and one may surmise that this fine impersonal hatred was one of the deepest motives, inseparably intellectual and emotional, behind his attacks on the Anglican bishops.

We see it in operation again when he presses his adversaries to examine the meanings of their own words and the implications of those meanings—making it look like a process of rubbing their noses in their own dirt. Stillingfleet is invoking one of the fundamental assumptions of Anglicanism when he declares that "the whole will of God is so plainly reveal'd in Scripture, that no sober Inquirer can miss of what is necessary to salvation". Sergeant immediately pounces on the term "sober enquirer". "It would be very requisite to know", he says, "how a man must be qualified to be a sober Enquirer"; and then, peremptorily: "I would have him clearly show (clearly, I say, for all depends upon it according to his Grounds) in what either the Roman Catholics or the Socinians fall short of being *sober* enquirers".¹⁶ What he is telling Stillingfleet is that he is required to define with precision the sense in which he is using the terms "sober enquirers" and "sober enquiry", or admit that they are meaningless—and thus, to use Sergeant's favourite expression, nothing but a "base shift" in the present controversy. And when Stillingfleet refuses to acknowledge the justice of this demand, Sergeant bears down in high fury on that "insignificant", "safe", "pretty" word *enquiry*. It is impossible, he rages, to charge a man with "the weakness or inevidence

¹⁵ *Method*, p. 351.

¹⁶ *Error Non-plust*, p. 91.

of his principles", or "the slackness of his consequences", if he is merely "enquiring":

They not so much as name the word *Principle*, nor vouch any argument Conclusive, or any Consequences to be *Necessary*, much less candidly affirm such in particular to be thus qualify'd; but hide and obscure all these in one dow-bak'd slippery word *Inquiry* by which means none can tell where to take any sure hold of any part of their Discourse.¹⁷

This is not the only "dow-bak'd slippery word" in which they seek refuge from their dearth of conclusive argument. Another (which we have already encountered) is "sufficient certainty". In his *Second Catholick Letter* Sergeant quotes his adversary: "Thus we prove we have sufficient certainty of our whole Faith"; and he comments incisively:

And this sufficient certainty of yours may be *no-Certainty*. For there goes no more to make a thing sufficient than to make a man content with it. A Yard of Cloth will make a sufficient Garment for him who is content to go half-naked, and a Table without Meat is a sufficient Meal for him who is contented to fast. And so long as you can prevail with your Protestants to be content *without Certainty*, you can prove they have Certainty abundantly Sufficient because *no-Certainty will suffice*.¹⁸

"Sufficiency", in other words, is no more than what is called nowadays a "criterion of satisfaction"; and this as a criterion is too contemptible to be taken seriously by a mind solidly grounded in the philosophical realism of Aristotle.

The same is true of "probability" ("probable" truth, "probable" certainty), to which the Probability Men constantly appeal. For Sergeant, "probability" is co-ordinate with "moral certainty", "sufficient certainty"; and "sober enquiry" is another spurious non-criterion masquerading as a real criterion. In *Solid Philosophy*, he elaborates on the philosophical objections to it. How can we know, he asks, what is more and what less probable? The answer is, we can't know, because probabilities are by their nature too capriciously variable to admit of being measured and compared. Sergeant makes his point with the help of a lively simile:

It is extremely hard to take Right Measures of Probability. Every Measure is a Certain Standard; whereas Probabilities are not capable of any; but, like desultory *Ignes-fatui*, whiffle now to this side, now to that; doubling and re-doubling; so that none can take their just Dimension or Proportion. They vary every Day, oft times every Hour.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁸ *Second Catholick Letter*, p. 20.

And he then refers disparagingly to the so-called measures invoked by the schoolmen:

Some hold that the Opinion of Three Doctors makes a Point Probable; some think the Opinion of Two is sufficient; some say One, who has maturely weigh'd the Point will serve &c . . . Where then shall we fix the Bounds and whence take any Certain Measure of Greater and Lesser Probabilities?¹⁹

Thus, the "probability" of the bishops, Sergeant concludes, has no claim whatever to the status of a criterion of truth. Only "science" admits of a "certain standard", which *can* be determined if men will devote themselves to the task—and if sceptics will stop throwing spanners in the works by denying that science (i.e. perfect knowledge) is attainable. "To obviate which Calumny", Sergeant adds in another autobiographical aside, "has these Fifty Years been the Butt of my Endeavours".²⁰

3. CRYPTO-IDEISM

The deepest ground of Sergeant's attacks on the latitudinarian bishops' concepts and criteria is their subterranean "ideism", of which they are doubtless barely conscious. This hidden issue rises into view most clearly in their dispute about the criterion of "firm assent", which on inspection turns out to be a close cousin of "moral certainty", or "sufficient certainty". Tillotson has declared "firm assent" to be the only ultimate ground of our certainty, and he instantly brings down coals of fire upon his head. Is that what you call a *criterion*?, Sergeant scornfully enquires. Is not every heretic capable of "firm assent"? A certainty based on "firm assent" is "such Certainty as one might have whether the thing is True or not, merely by vertue of firmly assenting to it as True!" Stillingfleet enters the three-cornered disputation to defend Tillotson's position, openly declaring that "Assent is not built on the nature of things but their Evidence to us". This for Sergeant is the last turn of the screw. Explicitly, relentlessly, he draws out the subjectivist-solipsist implications of Stillingfleet's statement. Tillotson's argument, he says,

still aim'd to take the business of Certainty out of the hands of the *Object*, and put it constantly upon the Subject, and to make account he was *sure* the thing was so because he verily judg'd it, or *did not doubt it*, to be so.

¹⁹ *Solid Philosophy*, pp. 451–452.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

And now Stillingfleet's defence of this argument carries their progress towards the abyss of a total subjectivism a good stage further:

[Once] the Object [is] set aside and the dependence of our Assents upon Things without us, . . . the Subjects are at Liberty to hold and say what best likes the spirit within them, or their voluntary Fancy; in which consists the glorious Liberty of Dr. Stillingfleet's Blessed Reformation.²¹

What Sergeant is charging them with is a philosophical "ideism" akin to Locke's and Descartes', which in turn is subsumed by the more inclusive "scepticism" that invades every corner of their theology. This was the charge that Thomas White brought against Joseph Glanvill in *An Exclusion of Scepticks*, and it is no accident that Glanvill, Tillotson, Stillingfleet, and Locke, all latitudinarians in philosophy or theology or both, should appear together on the same charge-sheet. The truth of the matter is that Tillotson and Stillingfleet are in fact committed to a quasi-nominalist, quasi-subjectivist, near-solipsist position. But they will not admit it—either because they are only dimly conscious of it, and still less of its philosophical and theological implications; or, as Sergeant thinks, because they are afraid of facing its dire consequences for their theological beliefs that he has been at pains to expose. At any rate, this pervasive ambiguity in the philosophical basis of their theology gives Sergeant his advantage; and this he exploits without inhibition to uncover their resultant contradictions and evasions.

²¹ *Error Non-plust*, pp. 165, 166, 168.

EPILOGUE

Like the genii from the bottle, the portrait of John Sergeant's intellectual personality rises in bright, sharp contours from his battles with the Anglican bishops. An attack seems scarcely to have come off the printing-press before he has answered it, precisely and copiously; and he sustains this blitzkrieg pace over a period of some forty years. He lets nothing pass. He has no respect for great names, unless, as with Locke, he respects the man, or rather the mind behind the name. He dislikes and resents the "raillery" of a Tillotson, but gives as good as he gets in the way of derisive irony; and he does not care about offending the patrician sensibilities of his Anglican lordships with his free, homely, hard-hitting tone and style. Most of all, what rises from the bottle is the very genius of controversy. That there were values other than logical coherence, or frames of reference other than "controversy-logicke", or indeed human activities other than controversy, appears scarcely to have occurred to him. He pursues his self-appointed life's task with a single-mindedness that one is free to judge admirable, awe-inspiring, even heroic, or just plain fanatical. He is the Compleat Controvertist, who lives, breathes, eats and drinks controversy, who seems to spend every waking hour either planning or executing the defeat of the adversary, and who finds his *summum bonum* in the exposure of the contradictions he had avowed himself to hate with all his heart.

APPENDIX

[This paper was written by Dorothea Krook in the 1950s. It is clear that, in the light of her subsequent research on Sergeant, she would have wished to make certain amendments, but it is printed here as she left it, in the belief that it includes useful material which would otherwise be wasted.]

'JOHN SERGEANT AND THE JESUITS'

John Sergeant, Roman Catholic priest and controversialist (1623–1707), has a special claim to the attention of the student of 17th-century thought in England. Though in his own time he was best known as a Catholic controversialist, his gifts and accomplishments were not restricted to this field. He was also a logician and philosopher, who, in a dominantly anti-Aristotelian age, upheld the Aristotelian logic and metaphysics with a vigour, a cogency, and an originality remarkable even in an age as rich in philosophical and quasi-philosophical writing as the latter half of the 17th century. His several treatises against the Cartesian philosophy¹ and his critique of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*,² in which he sought to discredit the new philosophy of the 'Ideists' (as he called them) by the light of the principles and methods of the old peripateticism, deserve an honourable place among the best works of philosophical criticism of the period.

As a controversialist in the Roman cause Sergeant's achievements were not less impressive. He had been converted to the Roman Church soon after graduating from St. John's College, Cambridge in 1642–3, had then spent ten years at the English College at Lisbon, returning to England in about 1653 to become canon and presently secretary of the Chapter. The year 1655, in which his first polemical treatise appeared,³ marks the beginning of Sergeant's career as a controversialist, which did not end until 1707 when (say his biographers) 'he died with a pen in his hand' at the age of 84. In that half-century Sergeant crossed swords with some of the most eminent Anglican divines of the period—among

¹ *Non Ultra*: or, A Letter to a Learned Cartesian settling the Rule of Truth and First Principles upon the Deepest Ground (London, 1698); *Raillery Defeated by Calm Reason* (London, 1699).

² *Solid Philosophy Asserted against the Fancies of the Ideists* (London, 1697).

³ *Schism Dis-Arm'd of the Defensive Weapons lent it by Doctor Hammond and the Bishop of Derry* (Paris, 1655).

them Bishop Bramhall, Jeremy Taylor, Stillingfleet and Tillotson—on some of the main disputed issues between Catholics and Protestants, but in particular on the central issue of the ‘rule of faith’. Sergeant has left a vivid account of these polemical battles in his autobiographical *Literary Life* written a few years before his death; and since he was agreeably free of any false modesty about his own achievements, the *Literary Life* owes much of its charm to the passages of self-congratulation with which Sergeant embellishes the record of his triumphs, recalling with satisfaction arguments especially well conducted, replies memorably devastating, the rage or exasperation or stupefied silence of an adversary brought face to face with the bad consequences of his bad principles.

For the historian of thought the main interest of Sergeant’s controversial works lies in the fact that they are all, essentially, essays in ‘applied’ logic. Finding his immediate inspiration in a book by his master Thomas White called *Controversy-Logick*,⁴ Sergeant addressed himself to the task of reforming the current degenerate methods of conducting theological polemics. The futile citing of ‘authorities’, the arbitrary ‘re-stating’ of questions in such a way as totally to transform their meaning, the looseness, evasiveness, irrelevance and inconsequentiality that (he found) everywhere disfigured the polemics of friends and adversaries alike—these (argued Sergeant) might be minimised out of existence by a rigorous application of the peripatetic ‘rules of art’. These ‘rules’ Sergeant had of course learnt, in the first instance, as part of the ordinary curriculum at Cambridge in the 1630’s. His distinctive achievement was to transform those commonplace rules and procedures of the ordinary academic ‘disputation’ into an instrument of radical logical analysis; and to apply them in his own polemical writings with a consistency, a tenacity and an indefatigability judged by his friends to be truly heroic and by his enemies perfectly fanatical. He handled those rules, moreover, with the kind of ease and skill that can never be achieved by training alone but must be accounted for by a strong dash of native genius; yet (one likes to note) he never allowed that ease and skill to degenerate into mere virtuosity. For his performances were always controlled by his consciousness of the supreme ‘concernment’ of the end towards which his polemical endeavours were directed. It was no trivial matter they were

⁴ Thomas White, *Controversy-Logicke, or the method to come to truth in debates of religion* (1659).

discussing, but the Rule of Faith itself; and Sergeant never forgot this, even when the provocation to be merely ingenious, merely to 'score points', was strongest.

These are some aspects of John Sergeant's mind and temper that may indicate to the reader unacquainted with his writings the nature and quality of his intellectual endowments and the kind of service he was able to render to the Catholic cause by the exercise of his gifts. There is, however, another side to Sergeant's life and works, which lies outside of his career as a philosopher and theologian, and would seem to reflect little credit upon him either as a Catholic priest or a man of honour. I refer to that important chapter in his life that concerns his alleged complicity in the Popish Plot. This has been made the subject of a full and scholarly study by Mr. M.V. Hay in his book *The Jesuits and the Popish Plot* (1934); and it is the specific purpose of these articles to review that episode in Sergeant's life and Mr. Hay's account of it.

No-one who has read Mr. Hay's book could fail to find his case against Sergeant at once persuasive and challenging. Its persuasiveness is due to the formidable documentary evidence upon which Mr. Hay has been able to rest his case—evidence that would seem to establish conclusively Sergeant's dishonourable part in the Plot. But it is also challenging because at least some of Mr. Hay's interpretations, of Sergeant's motives, in particular, are open to question; and there is, besides, fresh documentary evidence to be taken into account which (it will be seen) cannot easily be reconciled with the evidence upon which Mr. Hay has based his case against Sergeant.

In these articles I propose to examine Mr. Hay's account of John Sergeant's part in the Popish Plot with the general object of disengaging the stronger part of his case from the weaker. Specifically, my object is two-fold: first, to bring forward a further important document in connection with the actual events of Sergeant's part in the Plot, of which Mr. Hay appears to have had no knowledge; second, to suggest an interpretation radically at variance with Mr. Hay's of the whole historical and personal background of those events. The fresh interpretation, if its validity can be established, must, I think, seriously undermine the cogency of Mr. Hay's case against Sergeant; and the fresh document, though it is not conclusive against Mr. Hay's case, does at least cast a doubt upon the sufficiency of his evidence for an unqualified indictment of Sergeant.

I.

The thesis of Mr. Hay's book falls conveniently into two parts. The first, which is concerned with the historical and personal background of Sergeant's complicity in the Plot, turns principally upon Sergeant's violent antipathy to the Jesuits and the "Gallicanism" that (according to Mr. Hay) was the chief cause of that antipathy. The second part is concerned to set out the facts of Sergeant's part in the Plot, with all the relevant documentation. I propose to take up the second first, since that is the stronger and more simply factual part of Mr. Hay's case and is therefore more easily and briefly disposed of. The first calls for rather more circumstantial treatment since it turns upon differences in interpretation and involves more varied and more complex material.

The bare facts of Sergeant's involvement in the Popish Plot, as these emerge from Mr. Hay's admirably full account, are as follows. In the autumn of 1679 John Sergeant, who had fled to Holland at the beginning of the Plot troubles, returned to England under the protection of the Hon. Henry Sidney, the British Envoy to the States of Holland, for the ostensible purpose of making a deposition concerning the Popish Plot to the King and the Privy Council. The deposition was in fact made on October 30th or 31st, 1679,⁵ and, according to the record preserved in the Journal of the House of Commons,⁶ its purpose was to bring before the Privy Council a fresh piece of incriminating evidence against Father John Gavan, a Jesuit, who, along with Father Thomas Whitbread, the Provincial, and three other Jesuits, had been among the first victims to suffer execution in June of the same year. Sergeant's evidence was to the effect that he had had it reported to him by an English-woman in Brussels that Father Gavan had in her presence maintained that the Queen might lawfully kill the King her husband for his conjugal infidelities.⁷ In this deposition Sergeant was supported by another Catholic priest, David Morris or Maurice, who told the same story with minor variations in the details.⁸ The interest of this double deposition against Father Gavan—but Sergeant's especially, since

⁵ Henry Sidney, *Diary of the Times of Charles II* (ed. R. W. Blencowe. (2 vols., London, 1843), Vol. I, p. 176.

⁶ *Journal of the House of Commons*, Vol. IX (1667-1687), p. 710. The deposition is also printed in *Informations of John Sergeant and David Morris, relating to the Popish Plot, delivered . . . to the House of Commons* (London, 1681) and in H. Foley, *Records of the English Province*, S. J., Vol. V, Series XII, pp. 463-4.

⁷ *Commons Journal*, p. 710; Foley, *op. cit.*, pp. 463-4.

⁸ *Commons Journal*, p. 711; Foley, pp. 464-5.

he was much the more important witness—was, of course, that it would appear to confirm the justice of the sentence passed upon Father Gavan and his fellow-martyrs; and would appear to confirm it on the grounds on which Shaftesbury and his men most wished to have it confirmed—namely, that those implicated in the Plot were ‘king-killers’, therefore guilty of high treason, and for that reason and no other made to suffer the death penalty. The executions (Shaftesbury would now be able to claim with renewed confidence) were no part of a religious persecution but only the legitimate and time-honoured way of securing the life of the King.

The full circumstances of Sergeant’s return to England and his deposition to the King and Council will presently be more closely examined when the story of Sergeant’s complicity in the Plot has been completed. This sequel is briefly told. Sergeant, after making his deposition about Father Gavan, remained in England under the protection of the King for a period of more than four years, from the time of his arrival in October 1679 to at least February 1684. And the reason for his continued sojourn in England at a time when all other Catholic priests were either in hiding or in exile was that he was being employed by Shaftesbury as a spy upon the English Jesuits, and was receiving throughout those four years a regular (and very handsome) allowance out of the secret service funds placed at Shaftesbury’s disposal for the prosecution of the Plot. Mr. Hay quotes in full a letter written by Sergeant to an unnamed person of importance⁹ in which Sergeant offers in return for ‘the protection and support of the State’ to ‘bend all (his) endeavours to drive the Jesuits and all their ill principles out of our native country’.¹⁰ Finally, for the completion of his case, Mr. Hay cites the records preserved in the ledger account of *Moneys Received and Paid for Secret Services of Charles II and James II*¹¹ of regular payments made to Sergeant out of that fund over a period extending from 15th December 1679 to 15th February 1684.

Neither the authenticity of the incriminating letter nor the significance of the records in the Secret Services ledger account

⁹ M. V. Hay, *The Jesuits and the Popish Plot* (London, 1934), pp. 159–162. Mr. Hay believes the person to have been Shaftesbury himself. I will try to show presently (Additional Note, below) that it was much more likely to have been Charles Spencer, Earl of Sunderland, to whom Sergeant addressed this letter; and will suggest what bearing this may have upon Mr. Hay’s case against Sergeant.

¹⁰ Hay, *op.cit.*, p. 161.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 163–5. This ledger account was published by the Camden Society in 1851 (ed. J. Y. Akerman).

can be doubted. The letter is corroborated by several entries in the Register of the Privy Council (not cited by Mr. Hay), in which Sergeant's offer to serve the Government is mentioned, and the granting of his pardon and his allowance duly recorded.¹² And though the records of the payments made to Sergeant out of the Secret Services fund do not specify the services for which they were being made, the nature of those services may be safely inferred from the fact that the entries against Sergeant's name often occur in close proximity to those made against the names of Titus Oates and Israel Tonge—which also do not specify the nature of the services rendered.

This, then, is the main evidence upon which Mr. Hay bases his indictment of John Sergeant. And on this evidence the case against him appears black indeed. To quote Mr. Hay: '... It is difficult to think of any plea in his defence; with an excess of leniency offensive to probability, it might be urged that this lapse from the path of honour took place at a time of national excitement when many people in England behaved in a manner of which they were afterwards ashamed'. But—on the evidence, rightly—Mr. Hay disallows this plea; for the damning ledger account leaves no room for doubt 'that his contract with the English Government was not merely, on his part, a proposal made in a moment of passion to be afterwards regretted and repudiated; it was a contract paid for, and carried on over four years...'¹³

What, if anything, can be brought forward in Sergeant's defence? The main piece of counter-evidence, already referred to, is a letter written by Sergeant to the author of a book entitled *The Blatant Beast Muzzled: or, Reflexions on a Late Libel entituled The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II and K. James II*, which appeared in 1691.¹⁴ The book purports to be an exposure of the lies and libels contained in this Secret History; and since John Sergeant happened to be one of the victims of the 'blatant beast', the author sent Sergeant an exact copy of half a page of the Secret History which concerned him, desiring him to give his account of the matter.¹⁵

¹² Register of the Privy Council, 1679–80 (Public Record Office), entries for 19 Sept., 1679, 7 Nov. 1679 (two entries), 12 Dec., 1679, 9 March, 1679–80.

¹³ Hay, *op. cit.* pp. 162–3.

¹⁴ I wish to acknowledge gratefully my indebtedness to the late Canon J. Sullivan of the English College at Lisbon for telling me about this letter, and sending me the transcript contained in his article 'John Sergeant and the Popish Plot', *The Lisbonian* XXIII, 1949, 14–19, 39–46.

¹⁵ The introductory note to the transcript of Sergeant's letter in *The Lisbonian* adds that the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzled*, though unacquainted with

Sergeant's account is contained in this letter, which describes minutely the circumstances of his return to England and appearance before the King and Privy Council in October 1679. The full force of the letter is, I think, lost unless it is read entire: for its persuasiveness lies in the sheer circumstantiality of the story that Sergeant sets out. A summary of the main points can, however, at least show its bearing on Mr. Hay's case and is therefore worth attempting.

The most important point that emerges from the letter is that Sergeant did not return to England of his own desire but under the combined pressure of one Rookwood, an agent provocateur in the employ of Shaftesbury, and the British Envoy at the Hague, Mr. Henry Sidney (afterwards Earl of Romney).¹⁶ So far from offering to testify before the King and Council, Sergeant repeatedly protested his complete ignorance of the Plot both to Rookwood and Sidney, also his belief that most of the persons supposedly concerned in the Plot were innocent, and that he himself had nothing whatever to disclose in connection with the Plot. This part of his story is substantially confirmed by the entries in Sidney's Diary.¹⁷ It was only when several direct orders had been received by Sidney from the King commanding Sergeant to appear before the Council that he felt himself obliged to comply. He insists, however, that he went with the intention of disclaiming all knowledge of the Plot; and this intention (according to the rest of his story) he fully carried out.

In the earlier portions of this long letter, Sergeant gives a circumstantial account of the part played by Rookwood in what appears to have been a plot laid by Shaftesbury himself to lure him back to England. This part of Sergeant's story is worth recounting, since, if it is true, it throws much light on certain points that Mr. Hay himself has found a trifle obscure.¹⁸ At their

Sergeant, had been 'the willing' to examine the charges against him because he was informed "that he was held by all that knew him (the Lords of the Privy Council amongst the rest) to be a man of sincerity and ingenuity".

¹⁶ The King, it seems, knew something about Rookwood, and what he knew was not to Rookwood's credit. 'I know well that he [Rookwood] is a Rogue', Sergeant reports the King to have said at their interview, 'for he took Money of Oliver and betray'd me and my Friends . . .' (Sergeant's Letter to the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzled*, p. 41)

¹⁷ Sidney, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 163, 166-7, 176.

¹⁸ Mr. Hay remarks (*op. cit.* p. 149) 'that there seems to have been some hitch in the programme: three weeks passed and Sergeant had not arrived'. This three weeks' delay, between the time Sergeant was first expected in England towards the end of September and his actual arrival at the end of October, would be satisfactorily explained by Sergeant's account of his repeated refusals, both to

first meeting, Rookwood, it seems, tried to draw him out on the subject of the Plot. 'I told him', writes Sergeant —

I told him I verily believ'd it was a Contrivance of some designing Politicians, to unhinge the Government; alledging for that Judgment of mine the Incredibility, if not Impossibility, of many of the things attested, the slight or rather no credit of the Witnesses, and the Incoherence of their Testimonies in many particulars. I alledg'd also, That the evidence they gave in was unabett'd by any Circumstances, or Overt Acts, except such as were meerly talk't of, not prov'd, which therefore I believ'd to be forged. . . . Lastly, that all the persons condemned on that account, did dye, taking it upon their Salvation, they were Innocent, to believe what Charity and Christianity enjoyned me . . .

In spite of this declaration, however, Rookwood (as Sergeant was later to discover) sent two letters to the King and Council 'importing that I had told him of 2 Plots; the one of the Jesuites, to kill the King; the other of the Secular Clergy, to raise a vast Sum of Money, and by it an Army, and so bring in Popery by force'. Sergeant, hearing a rumour of this—though still ignorant that Rookwood was the source—published a protestation 'calling God to witness that I neither knew any thing of the Plot, nor said or signified to any that I did; as also that I had neither written nor caus'd any to write into England any thing to that purpose; and, that I renounced any Pardon that should be offered me upon the score of knowing and CONCEALING the Plot'.¹⁹

Rookwood's false information, it presently transpired, was part of the plot devised by Shaftesbury to induce Sergeant by bribery to give false testimony before the King and Council, 'He (Rookwood) told me', Sergeant records

how my Lord Shaftesbury had written Two Letters hither, much in my Commendation, and that if I would come over (and, as we are to suppose, to be ruled by him) I should neither want Security

Rookwood and Sidney, to appear before the King and Council on the false supposition that he had anything to tell about the Plot. That Sergeant is giving a true account of the delay seems again to be confirmed by one of the entries in Sidney's *Diary*. 'Mr. Sergeant came to me', writes Sidney on October 14th, 'with a resolution of going into England; but having called God to witness he could tell nothing of the plan, I thought it was better for him not to go for the present, but to promise to be ready whenever I should send to him . . . I writ to my Lord Sunderland, Sir William Temple, and G. Spencer; I believe it is likely I may be blamed for not letting him come over; all I can say is, when I thought he could tell anything, I pressed him extremely to make haste to come over; when I found he could tell nothing, I did not press him.' (Sidney, *op. cit.*, p. 167).

¹⁹ Mr. Hay quotes at length (*op. cit.*, pp. 166–7) a document preserved in the Westminster Archives bearing the endorsement *Dr Sergeants Protestation about the Plot*, which would seem to be a summary of this very letter.

nor Money nor Honour. He added, That I could not but know something of the Duke of York; that, if I did but witness it, there was Ten Thousand Pound laid up ready for me. At this I could not but blush with Anger to hear such a villainous Proposal; and reply'd, Certainly, Sir, the World is grown very generous, that a poor man can get 1,000 l. so easily, and yet be an honest man. He smil'd and said I was a droll, and that he hoped I had wit enough to know my own Interest...

Rookwood, on being pressed by Sergeant to disclose the source of his information, denied that he himself was the recipient of this 'villainous Proposal' of Shaftesbury. Sergeant, nevertheless, suspecting that some 'devilish trap' had been prepared for him, wrote, this time direct to the King, again denying all knowledge of the Plot:

... I wrote and sent a letter to His Majesty, protesting upon my faith as a Christian, and upon my Allegiance to him, which was one part of it, that I never knew, directly or indirectly, the least thing of the Plot, nor ever did say or signifie to any that I did; humbly begging his Majesty would take some way, as he in his Princely Wisdom should think fit, to clear me of this dangerous Mistake, lest, if I should come into England, my invincible Ignorance might be interpreted as voluntary Concealment which would expose me to the highest Dangers.

That Sergeant did in fact write to the King is confirmed by Sidney's Diary; but what were the contents of the letter is not disclosed or at least, not unambiguously.²⁰ Rookwood's letters, in any case, had done their work; the King sent a further Order desiring Sergeant to appear in person before the Council; and Sergeant, accompanied by Sidney, finally crossed over to England.

In his two successive interviews—the first, preliminary audience with the King attended only by the Earl of Sunderland, the second with the King and the whole Privy Council—Sergeant was questioned about the contents of Rookwood's letters. On both occasions, he exposed the falsity of Rookwood's information, first briefly and informally to the King himself, then in detail and under oath to the Council. At the second interview, which (Sergeant says) lasted two hours, he devoted almost the whole

²⁰ The entry in Sidney's *Diary* (*op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 174) reads: '... Mr. Meredith... shewed me a letter from Mr. Sergeant, by which I find he has a great mind to be sent for over—he writ to the King'. The punctuation here leaves it uncertain whether his letter that Mr. Meredith showed Sidney was a copy of his letter that Sergeant 'writ to the King' or another letter written to Mr. Meredith himself. But even if it were a copy of Sergeant's letter to the King, its expressing a desire 'to be sent for over' would not be inconsistent with his denying all knowledge of the Plot, especially since he had already promised Sidney to return to England if the King should continue to insist on his returning.

of his time to proving Rookwood's information to be false, and by the end of it had succeeded in satisfying the King and Council of his 'Ingenuity and Rookwood's knavery'.

It is at this point in his own narrative that Sergeant mentions the crucial deposition against Father Gavan. This deserves to be given in his own words:

I was very large and particular in my discourses of this Nature [i.e. concerning Rookwood's information] till both His Majesty and the whole Council were perfectly satisfied of my Ingenuity and Rookwood's Knavery. After which I was questioned about some Tenets of certain Catholick Writers; and about a Story which I and others heard in Flanders from a Gentlewomen, about some words said to be spoke by one of those dyed; to all of which, being still (as my Lord Chancellor told me) upon my Oath, I Answered according to the best of my Knowledge, as became a sincere Christian; but I was so far from Charging it upon that Gentleman, or making a Plotter for it, that I Declared openly (having first ask't His Majesties Pardon for speaking freely) that both he and the other four, nay, all the rest that suffer'd for the Plot, did in my Opinion dye innocent. A thing which I believe few at that time of day durst have done; but, being upon my Oath, I was resolv'd to speak my true thoughts without fear or favour of any. The whole Narrative of which Particulars I (as I was then commanded) gave in under my Hand to the Council, where they are yet to be seen.

He goes on to make explicitly the point about his statement concerning Father Gavan that is already implicit in the disposition of his whole narrative:

I desire that it may be observed that these Two last Points, about which I had been examined, came in onely accidentally; and were far from being the Occasion of my being sent for, or coming over. For the whole Series of this Transaction shews manifestly the sole Occasion of my coming was to speak to Rookwood's Papers, concerning the Two pretended Plots; and that the others came in on the by only. Which will stop the Mouths of my Traducers and Maligners, who give it out, not only that I made means to come, but also that this was the sole, at least main Reason of my coming, and would have had me forswear my self to gratifie Parties . . .

The main part of Sergeant's letter ends with his protesting faithfully to the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzled* that 'this is the true History of that affair in every particular, as far as my Memory reaches'; and adds that 'the Truth of the main Branches of it, which sustain all the rest, do not depend upon my meer sayings, or my Memory; but upon Authentic Testimonies, known matters of fact, and on my papers given in to the Council, containing great part of what I said before them, to be found yet among their Records. . . .'

It is now possible to sum up the value of Sergeant's letter as

counter-evidence to Mr. Hay's account of this whole episode. It must again be emphasised that the sheer circumstantiality of Sergeant's account makes it very difficult to doubt its truth in all essentials. If the whole story is a fabrication, Sergeant must indeed have been a colossal liar—not merely (as Mr. Hay suggests) endowed with a rare capacity for self-deception. Besides, as I have already indicated, some of the essential points of his story are independently confirmed by Sidney's Diary; conspicuously, that the man Rookwood was the intermediary in the whole affair; that Sergeant protested to the end that he knew nothing about the Plot; that he was prevailed upon to return to England only by the explicit and repeated command of the King; and that in his audience with the King, 'he made the same protestations' (Sidney notes in his Diary) 'that he had done to me; that he knew nothing of the plot.'²¹ Again, Sergeant's statement that, in making his deposition concerning the story about Father Gavan, 'he was so far from charging it upon that Gentleman, or making him a Plotter for it, that I declared openly . . . that both he and the other four, nay, all the rest that suffered for the Plot, did in my Opinion dye innocent'—this is confirmed by the formal deposition itself as transcribed in the Commons Journal.²²

One piece of evidence, however, which, if extant, would have confirmed Sergeant's story beyond the possibility of dispute, appears unfortunately to be missing. This is a full report of his interview with the King and Council on October 31st (if Sidney's dates are to be trusted), which, Sergeant claims, lasted a full two hours. If this was really the case, he must at least have said a good deal more than is recorded in the formal deposition against Father Gavan; and if his story of what he did say in those two hours is true, the minutes of that meeting would have confirmed it. But the Privy Council Register shows only a blank in this connection; and I have been unable to track down this crucial record in any other likely place. In the absence of this final confirmatory

²¹ Sidney, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 176.

²² The last paragraph of the deposition reads as follows: 'These are the reasons why I apprehend that relation [of the English-woman in Brussels] to be true; which yet I produce not here to charge Mr. Gavan, but to discharge my own credit and conscience, and to give your Majesty and your Council the best light I am able to judge of that business'. (Foley, *op. cit.*, p. 464) Since this paragraph would not increase the value of Sergeant's testimony against Father Gavan in the eyes of those seeking confirmation of Oates' depositions, it is not likely that it would have been included in the formal statement to the House of Commons unless Sergeant had particularly insisted that it should be included; and this again would seem to corroborate the story he tells in the letter to the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzled*.

evidence, Sergeant's own account of the whole episode must to that extent remain open to doubt. But, if the independent (though not conclusive) confirmations I have mentioned are borne in mind, the letter to the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzled* does suggest that Mr. Hay's account of the episode is at least incomplete, and, if all were known, *may* be doing Sergeant an injustice more or less grave.

In the concluding section of his letter, Sergeant, in compliance with the request of the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzled*, sets out in order 'how many open falsities are contain'd in that half-page which you sent me' (from the *Secret History*); and in the course of this statement he makes his only reference to his own immediately subsequent history, which (as we have seen) has such a prominent place in Mr. Hay's case for the prosecution:

He [the author of the *Secret History*] says I was *sent back* with God knows how much Money. And this is so perfectly false, that the whole Council, and Thousands of others, who conversed with me a long time after in *London*, can witness the contrary: For in the Order to call me hither, after their Promise there exprest, that I should *return in Three Months*, they immediately added these words (*If he shall so think fit*) and because I did *not think fit* to do so, they were pleas'd still to *renew my Protection* and *Leave to stay* from three months to three months, for a long time.

'Because I did not think fit to do so, they were pleased still to renew my Protection and Leave to stay from three months to three months for a long time'. This obviously does not square with the reason for the prolongation of his stay in England that is disclosed by that incriminating letter to the unnamed person of importance and the record of payments made to him out of the Secret Services fund. It does not impair the value of the rest of the letter as counter-evidence to Mr. Hay's account of his conduct in connection with Father Gavan, but it does leave one, on the available evidence, with no alternative but to believe that he did offer his services to the Government to help expel the Jesuit Order from England. What exactly Sergeant's motives were for this seemingly dishonourable undertaking, and whether his motives, when fully understood, may be accepted at least for explanation and perhaps also for justification, it is now our task to enquire.

II.

That Sergeant's violent antipathy to the Jesuits and his consequent desire to have the Order expelled from England was the motive behind his offer to serve the Government as a 'spy' cannot

be doubted. That this antipathy was the joint-product of a doctrinaire 'Gallicanism' and a virulent hatred of the Order on personal grounds is, however, distinctly open to question. Mr. Hay's account of the causes of Sergeant's anti-Jesuit feeling turns exclusively upon these two points—his alleged Gallicanism and his arbitrary dislike of the Jesuits; and on neither point, I believe, can Mr. Hay's case against Sergeant be sustained.

It will be convenient to deal with these points separately: to consider first the historical background to the bitter conflicts between the secular clergy and the regulars in the latter half of the 17th century, in which Sergeant as Secretary of the Chapter from about 1655 played an important part; and then to take up the personal conflict arising out of Sergeant's polemical encounter with Peter Talbot, Archbishop of Dublin, which reinforced an existing antipathy.

A crucially important source for the relevant historical material is Sergeant's own *Account of the Chapter*, published in 1706, just one year before his death. This has the advantage of supplying both the historical facts relevant to the present inquiry and the interpretation of those facts widely held by the secular clergy of the Chapter and at least a proportion of the laity; for Sergeant writes here in a representative rather than a personal capacity, as the spokesman of the Chapter and that part of the laity which stood with the Chapter.

The danger of Sergeant's being a biased account of the facts cannot, of course, be overlooked. But when Mr. Hay finds it possible to dismiss Sergeant's book as totally valueless on the ground that 'no confidence can safely be placed in anything that John Sergeant has written about the Jesuits'²³ he goes too far. For the fact that Mr. Hay has failed to take into account, or chosen to ignore, and at any rate withheld from the readers of his book, is that Sergeant's history does not come to us bare and unsubstantiated, and consequently exposed to every conjectural doubt as to its veracity. It comes to us in a form that would render it acceptable to any professional historian as a contemporary document of the greatest historical value. For whatever degree of bias was in fact present in the original text has been corrected out of existence by the labours of the nineteenth-century editor of Sergeant's book, William Turnbull, a layman (by his own declaration) 'indifferently affected to regulars and seculars, respecting each alike'. Turnbull has examined with scrupulous care and

²³ Hay, *op. cit.*, p. 70

thoroughness every important statement of fact and every important interpretation in the book; has been at pains to draw attention to minor errors of fact and minor logical lapses in Sergeant's narrative; and has cited in detail numerous contemporary documents, besides the opinions of later historians, in support of the truth of Sergeant's story in all its main facts and interpretation. No-one who has studied the text and checked a large proportion of Turnbull's confirmatory and corrective notes can fail to be impressed equally with the essential truth of Sergeant's *Account* and the impartiality and thoroughness of his editor.

Some of the contemporary documents that support the earlier portions of Sergeant's history (in particular the history of the 'Wisbeach Stirs') are to be found in T. G. Law's collection entitled *Jesuits and Seculars in the Reign of Elizabeth* (1889). The account of this material that Law himself offers in the long Introduction to his book is corroborated in all its essential points by E. L. Taunton in his *History of the Jesuits in England* (1901). A contemporary history that confirms much of Sergeant's account of the Wisbeach episode is the *Historia missionis Anglicanae Societatis Jesu* (St. Omer, 1660) by the Jesuit Father Henry More—'the historian and panegyrist of the Society', as Turnbull calls him. Neither Father More's book, nor Law's, nor Taunton's is listed in Mr. Hay's bibliography. One wonders at these omissions; and wonders also whether a study of these independent corroborations of Sergeant's history might not have compelled Mr. Hay to modify his view that 'no confidence can be safely placed in anything that John Sergeant has written about the Jesuits'.

It is not possible in the space of a short article to exhibit *in extenso* the corroborative evidences supplied by these documents and books. I have therefore been obliged to confine myself to this mere indication of Sergeant's credentials as a historian of the conflicts between seculars and regulars in the 16th and 17th centuries; and, leaving it to the interested reader to follow up the references, I propose now to outline the main argument of Sergeant's book in an effort to show what were the historical grounds for his antipathy to the Jesuits.

Sergeant's narrative turns upon three principal matters. First, he recounts the sufferings of the clergy and laity in the period prior to the appointment of the first Bishop of Chalcedon in 1623—the period, that is, of roughly 40 years beginning with the 'Wisbeach Stirs' in the 1590's and covering the period of the archpriest's rule (1598–1622). Next, he describes at length the bitter disputes between the secular clergy and the regulars over

the appointment of an 'ordinary' bishop. These started as a result of the Wisbeach episode, were continued up to the time of the appointment of the first Bishop of Chalcedon, and were resumed, with increased intensity, in the thirty years' interregnum between the death of the second Bishop of Chalcedon in 1655 and the appointment of the first Apostolic Vicar in 1685. Third, Sergeant gives some account of the difficulties and discouragements that the Dean and Chapter were exposed to as a result of the intransigence of the Jesuits in that thirty-year period of capitular rule.

Throughout this period of over a hundred years, the conflict between the secular clergy and the regulars appears to have been almost as important a cause of the sufferings of the English Catholics as were the anti-Papist laws of Elizabeth and James and Oliver Cromwell. According to Sergeant's *Account*, it was the opposition of the Jesuits to an 'ordinary' bishop that led to the infliction of an arch-priest upon the Catholic community in the last years of Elizabeth's reign. It was again the hostility of the Jesuits to the Chapter that made the jurisdiction of the Chapter unnecessarily difficult in the latter years of the troubled Commonwealth period and the hardly less troubled period of the Restoration. And it was the Jesuits' persistent effort to assert the temporal power of the see of Rome in England that first delayed and finally frustrated the appointment of an 'ordinary' successor to the titular see of Chalcedon in the time of James II. And throughout the 17th century, it should be added, (Sergeant himself does not deal specifically with this point) the division of regulars and seculars on the burning question of the Oath of Allegiance further aggravated a condition of disunion already sufficiently disastrous.

This is the over-all picture that emerges from Sergeant's *Account of the Chapter*. We must now turn our attention to the main points of his argument.

Sergeant's indictment of the English Jesuits takes him as far back as the famous Wisbeach episode in the 1590's. In 1580 Dr. Watson, bishop of Lincoln, with four other Marian priests, was committed prisoner to Wisbeach castle. The college of prisoners, increased after the Babington conspiracy to thirty-two, appears in its first years to have been a model of a Christian fraternity. 'They lived', writes Sergeant, 'in such perfect unity and fraternal kindness that they became objects of admiration as well as compassion to their keepers . . . There was no disturbance, no feuds or animosities, but all calm and serene, all messengers and angels of

peace'.²⁴ But this felicity was not to last, for 'the vessel that carried them split asunder on a rock of dissension by the perfidious treachery of one of their own inmates'. This new inmate was Father Weston, Superior of the Jesuits, committed to the Wisbeach prison in 1587, 'whose restless spirit' (Sergeant continues) 'inspired him with ambitious thoughts, even in prison, and made him begin to cast about, the first week he came in, how he might domineer over his fellow-sufferers'. The details that follow of the effort of Father Weston (presently supported by Father Henry Garnett, the new Superior) to 'domineer' over the rest of the prisoners are based upon Bagshaw's *A True Relation of the Faction begun at Wisbich* . . . etc., first printed in 1595, and other contemporary documents. Sergeant recounts how Father Weston 'treated most uncivilly . . . those ancient and reverend doctors and missionaries' who resisted his attempt to impose his rule upon the Wisbeach prisoners; how he 'falsely and maliciously detracted from their reputation by unjust aspersions'; and how he finally split the college of prisoners into hostile factions, which pursued their violent unseemly quarrels over a period of years causing much grief and scandal to the Catholic community at large.²⁵ The deplorable effects upon Catholic unity of these disturbances at Wisbeach were presently aggravated by further conflicts between the secular clergy and the Jesuits over the appointment of the archpriest Blackwell (the 'Archpriest Controversy', as it has come to be known); and the final result of all this faction-fighting was that the Catholic community had by the turn of the century been reduced to what was virtually a condition of schism. At the accession of James I, writes Law:

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3; Law, *op. cit.*, p. li.

²⁵ Sergeant, *op. cit.*, p. 5; Law., *op. cit.*, pp. liii-lv; Taunton, *op. cit.* pp. 174-177. Law adds that 'the scheme [that is, Father Weston's scheme of government] was suspected from the beginning as an attempt of the Jesuits to usurp a superiority over the seminarists . . . This superiority was moreover dreaded not alone from the dislike of the secular clergy to be ruled by the religious, but because of the political projects which were foreseen to underlie the aim at ecclesiastical power.' (p. liii) And Taunton quotes 'as the best defence of Christopher Bagshawe, whose book gives the fullest account [of the Wisbeach Stirs]' a letter from *Father Henry Garnett* himself, dated 8 October 1595, in which the Superior of the English Jesuits implicitly admits that such an attempt 'to usurp a superiority over the seminarists' was in fact being made by the Jesuit faction at Wisbeach: 'Allow them [the Jesuits] to live', writes Garnett to Bagshawe, 'according to their wish; for no vow or law forbids it. Meanwhile do you live as you wish; that is, as becomes learned and pious priests, as you have hitherto done; for it is not fair that you should be bound by new rules without your freest consent'. (Taunton, *op. cit.*, p. 177. My emphasis).

... priests Jesuit and secular, were flying at each other's throats; and "designed martyrs" and confessors were reviling each other in language not exceeded in bitterness or violence by the most hostile of the Puritans. Protestant preachers were pointing at the scandal with derision, and statesmen were chuckling over the suicidal follies of men who had been boasting of adding new glories to the Catholic Church.²⁶

It was, in any event, the experience of the Wisbeach 'stirs', that appears to have been the immediate cause of the campaign for a bishop that was begun at about this time. As Sergeant puts it:

... Our venerable brethren began to think of some means to secure them and their posterity from the like or worse misfortunes by providing themselves with some lawful pastor, who might protect them, and curb any future insolencies; for it seemed an unheard and unparalleled attempt that those very auxiliaries, which but very lately had been invited in, and were the last workmen of all that were called into the vineyard should convert their forces against their benefactors, and, instead of endeavouring to re-establish the primitive doctrine in its ancient purity, should affect a domineering power, not only over the flock but the very pastors of Christ, who had hitherto borne the heat and burden of the day.²⁷

The seculars accordingly resolved to petition the Pope for a bishop with 'ordinary' powers, appealing to the precedent of the Irish Catholics who had already been granted a bishop. The Jesuits, however, got wind of the seculars' plan, and Robert Persons, then in Spain, hastened to Rome 'in order' (writes Sergeant) 'to obviate and obstruct any such advantageous assistance which thereby might accrue to the clergy'.²⁸

The celebrated Father Persons, generally regarded as the supreme exponent of the principles and practice of Jesuit statecraft in the age of Elizabeth, joint-architect of the Armada, and subsequently chief promoter of the Spanish claims to the succession, 'the principal author' (so he is designated in one of the appeals of the secular clergy to the Pope), 'the incensor and mover of all our garboils at home and abroad'—Father Persons had, it seems, set his face against an episcopal authority with 'ordinary' powers.²⁹ 'He wished', writes Turnbull, 'to introduce the power but not the authority of a bishop'; and he desired this 'from those ulterior designs on the independence of the clergy

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. ii–iii.

²⁷ Sergeant, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁹ Even Mr. J. H. Pollen, writing on Persons in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* and desiring to present his life and works in the most generous light possible, has to admit that 'his [Person's] participation in politics and in clerical feuds cannot be justified except in certain aspects'. Severer judgments of Persons are possible, of which Taunton's (in the work already cited) is one.

so constantly asserted in the writings and publications of the time.³⁰ This end of undermining the independence of the secular clergy was to be accomplished by imposing on the Catholic community an episcopal authority with 'extraordinary' powers—an authority, that is, directly dependent upon the Papal See and revocable *beneplacitum*. According to Law, 'the idea of an archpriest governing the secular clergy in subjection to the advice of a Jesuit superior seems to have been, on the part of Persons, a sudden inspiration'.³¹ This inspiration Persons contrived to render acceptable to the Papal court; and the result was the institution of the archpriest's rule, lasting from 1597 to 1623, and generally agreed to have been one of the least happy periods in the history of the Catholic Church in England.

Sergeant's narrative treats in some detail of the struggle between the secular clergy and the archpriest's party in the period between the establishment of the new authority and its ratification by papal brief in 1599.³² His account of the machinations by which Persons and his supporters first secured the appointment of the archpriest and then sought to enforce his rule in the teeth of the legitimate protests of the 'appellant' clergy appears to be amply confirmed by contemporary documents.³³ These documents confirm also the thoroughly 'Machiavellian' character of the means used. One vivid instance is Sergeant's account (reproduced from Bagshawe's *True Relation*) of the duplicity of Blackwell's emissary at Rome, one Standish, who in his audience with the Pope represented himself as the spokesman of the secular clergy, assuring His Holiness (quite falsely) that 'what he presumed to deliver was done by the most assured and unanimous consent of his brethren'. And when Standish was afterwards taxed with this 'unheard-of perficiousness' (as Sergeant calls it), he defended his conduct by appealing to that principle of 'mental reservation' that, perhaps above all other Jesuit doctrines, was responsible for the widespread distrust in which the Society was held in that age by Catholics and Protestants alike.³⁴ It is worth noting that Sergeant's account of what Taunton calls 'the sad and shameful story' of the treatment accorded in

³⁰ Sergeant, *op. cit.*, p. 10 n. Law (*op. cit.*, p. lx) and Taunton (*op. cit.*, pp. 210–12) both express similar opinions of Persons' aims.

³¹ Law, *op. cit.*, p. lix. Taunton takes the same view, *op. cit.*, p. 24, 24 n.

³² Sergeant, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–20.

³³ Turnbull cites some of them, *op. cit.*, pp. 4n., 22–24, 23n.

³⁴ Sergeant, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–16 (from Bagshaw, *True Relation*, ed. Law, pp. 75–77).

Rome to the two appellant priests, Bishop and Charnock, is remarkable for its restraint.³⁵

Sergeant then passes on to recount the sufferings of the clergy under 'the anarchical government of Mr. Blackwell' and his twelve assistants, 'who if not all Jesuits, yet were absolute dependants and favourites of them, acting and determining nothing but with and by their authority and approbation, to the great diminution of the portion of Christ and the absolute establishment of their own interest'. 'Insomuch' (he goes on) 'that his holiness, at length, understanding what indirect measures were taken here in the jurisdiction over the clergy, gave his positive commands that no Jesuit should know or be consulted in what peculiarly belonged to the clergy's affairs'.³⁶ This last papal decree was the result of a second 'appeal' (1602) when four deputies of the secular clergy presented to the Inquisition at Rome their *Gravamina* against the government of the archpriest.³⁷ Sergeant at this point in his narrative also quotes at length from the memorial presented to Pope Clement VIII in 1597 setting out what were considered to be the most objectionable practices of the Jesuits; and these (comments Turnbull) 'are abundantly confirmed by the evidence of other contemporary documents'.³⁸

The end of Blackwell's regime came, it seems, as a consequence of his allowing the taking of the Oath of Allegiance 'contrary to the sentiments of the Jesuits'. Thereupon, writes Sergeant, 'they represented him after the usual manner at Rome, as they had formerly done to others, and he was removed from the archpresbytery, and another was substituted in his room'. His successors were, first, Birkett then Harrison, both of whom similarly incurred the displeasure of the Jesuit party; and though

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18. Taunton tells the story at length (*op. cit.*, pp. 247–54), concluding with Dr. Ely's judgment upon this shocking episode quoted from his *Certain Briefs Notes*: 'Cloak and disguise it so well as you can now', (writes Ely) 'the posterity hereafter will wonder to hear or read that two Catholic priests, coming as appellants to Rome out of an heretical country, in which they maintained constantly with danger of their lives the honour and preservation of that see, and one of them [i. e. Bishop] had suffered some years' imprisonment with banishment afterwards for the articles of St. Peter his successor's supremacy over all other princes and prelates, that these priests (I say) should, before they were heard what they had to say, be cast into prison, yea, and imprisoned in the house [i. e. the English College at Rome] and under the custody of their adversaries [Robert Persons and his confederates] never was heard of such an injustice since good St. Peter sat in the Chair'. (Quoted Taunton, *op. cit.*, p. 254).

³⁶ Sergeant, *op. cit.* p. 22.

³⁷ Law, *op. cit.*, pp. cxiii–cxv; Taunton, *op. cit.*, pp. 259–70.

³⁸ Sergeant, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23.

Sergeant appears to be in error in suggesting that they, like Blackwell, were 'deposed' by the Jesuits, 'it is however true', notes Turnbull, 'that, though the audacious proceedings of the fathers did not succeed in actually cashiering these dignitaries, they were not ineffectual in impeding their authority'.³⁹

These internal dissensions were, in any event, the means of finally awakening the papal court to the needs of the English Catholics for an 'ordinary' episcopal government. A year after the death of Harrison (in 1622), the Pope admitted the agents of the secular clergy to an audience, and 'with tears of compassion pitied their circumstances, and out of a paternal care gave them a true father for their superior—that is, a bishop with ordinary jurisdiction'. The person appointed was Dr. William Bishop, one of the two 'appellants' of 1597, whom (writes Sergeant) His Holiness 'raised up as it were from the dunghill of affliction to seat him amongst the princes of his people to be the ordinary of England and titular of Chalcedon'.⁴⁰

The next two sections of Sergeant's narrative are concerned to establish respectively the 'ordinary' character of the power, authority and jurisdiction of the two bishops of Chalcedon, and the 'unquestionable validity' of the Chapter, erected by Bishop William Allen in 1624 and confirmed by Bishop Richard Smith in 1645, which was to rule the English Catholics in the thirty-year interregnum between the decease of the second Bishop of Chalcedon and the appointment of the first Apostolic Vicar. On both these questions, the conflict between the secular clergy and the Jesuits, now almost half a century old, appears to have been carried several stages further, until it reached a peak of intensity in the bitter disputes over the appointment of a successor to the titular see of Chalcedon.

We need not follow out the details of Sergeant's demonstration first, 'That the Power, Authority, and Jurisdiction of our two Bishops was truly ordinary' (this, it appears, with the object of confounding the 'audacious calumnies' of those who had insinuated that it was 'not truly episcopal and ordinary, but merely extraordinary and vicarious'),⁴¹ nor his account 'Of the Institution of our Chapter and of its unquestionable validity'. Our main task

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5, 25n.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴¹ On this point Sergeant appears to have been partly in error. The titular bishop of Chalcedon did indeed have all the powers of an 'ordinary'; but he was also revocable at the pleasure of the Pope. Turnbull discusses the point at length (*op. cit.*, p. 45n); and Taunton confirms his view (*op. cit.*, p. 411).

is to pursue, for the better understanding of Sergeant's anti-Jesuit feeling, the course of the further struggles between the seculars and the Jesuits in the thirty years between the decease of Bishop Richard Smith in 1655 and the appointment of the first Apostolic Vicar in 1685. This phase of the struggle falls within Sergeant's own time as canon and secretary of the Chapter from 1655; and it can hardly be doubted that the events of these years were mainly responsible for his violent antipathy to the Jesuits.

The general issue upon which this phase of the conflict turned was the appointment of an 'ordinary' bishop to succeed the deceased Bishop Smith. The secular clergy repeatedly, in those thirty years, supplicated the Pope to send them an 'ordinary' bishop, the regulars, with the Jesuits at the head, counter-suppliated for an apostolic vicar. The seculars believed that the regulars' demand for an apostolic vicar was motivated by self-interest; they wished (it was maintained) to ensure the continued influence of their Society upon the head of the English Church through their influence at the papal court, and had no better way of perpetuating this influence than by securing the appointment of an authority that was completely dependent for its powers and privileges upon the see of Rome. The regulars counter-claimed that the seculars' clamour for an 'ordinary' was motivated—to the extent that it was genuine at all—by the desire of an 'independence' that amounted to Gallicanism; that, further, their reasons for opposing the appointment of an apostolic vicar involved an indirect but nonetheless base compliance with the proscribed Oath of Allegiance; and, finally, their clamour for an 'ordinary' was in any case not genuine, but 'a mere pretence: . . . they asked for a bishop only because they hoped for a refusal . . . and their real object was to prolong the existence of their own power over the clergy.' On the last point, Turnbull's note is sufficient comment: 'For those who recollect the unceasing applications and importunate entreaties of the chapter for an episcopal superior, this will need no refutation'.⁴²

The charge of Gallicanism is more serious, and I will return to it presently. At this point it is worth examining the reasons actually offered by the secular clergy in their supplications to the pope to discover whether these really involved a capitulation to

⁴² Sergeant, *op. cit.*, p. 87n. Yet Mr. Hay re-affirms this view (*op. cit.*, pp. 93–4, 110) as if it were established matter of fact instead of being what it obviously is, a politically motivated slander; and affirms it without attempting any cogent explanation of those 'unceasing applications and importunate entreaties of the chapter for an episcopal superior' that Turnbull rightly stresses.

the Oath of Allegiance. This will necessitate some discussion of the delicate question of the taking of the Oath itself: which it is the more necessary to consider since Mr. Hay takes it for granted, as if it were an unquestionable fact, that the Jesuits' attitude on this question was right and also noble while that of the seculars was both wrong and despicable.

The seculars' reasons for desiring an 'ordinary' bishop and refusing a vicar apostolic are set out in three distinct places in Sergeant's history. The first is in the instructions to their agent Pendrick (in 1658), who was to present the following considerations to the Pope:⁴³

First, to desire a bishop *cum potestate ordinarii*; secondly, that we dare not accept of any authority but what is conformable to the ancient laws in ancient times, and which would be no offence to the government; thirdly, that he be one of the six the chapter hath named;⁴⁴ fourthly, if any other person or authority, contrary or inconsistent with this, be endeavoured to be imposed, that he resolutely oppose it, and disclaim against it, in the chapter's name: 1, because the ancient laws of England admit of no extraordinary power of the pope; 2, because there is a severe penalty, called a *proemunire* against those that shall receive any such; 3, that in King Henry VIII's time, the clergy, by reason of this, were compelled to quit the pope's authority; 4, that all the laity will fall under the same *proemunire* also; 5, that the chapter think themselves bound in conscience to acquaint the laity of the danger they are in by accepting of such an authority; 6, that the state is already too jealous of an intrenchment from the arbitrary power of the court of Rome: and therefore they dare not accept of any superior but an ordinary bishop.

That the fears of the Chapter for the Catholic clergy and laity in England in the event of an apostolic vicar being appointed to the English see were legitimate because well-founded is shown by the message sent by Charles II on the occasion of a general assembly convened by Chapter in 1661. Sergeant as secretary had made a point of informing the King of the proposed assembly, '(to assure him) that their intention was only to settle some concerns belonging to their private affairs, and their obtaining a bishop for their government; and that they would choose none

⁴³ Sergeant, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–82.

⁴⁴ The nomination and election of the bishops was one of the privileges specifically conferred upon the Chapter by its founders; and this power was confirmed by the successive popes who acknowledged its validity as constituted by those founders (Sergeant, *op. cit.*, pp. 68, 80n et al). Consequently Mr. Hay's repeated imputation (*op. cit.*, pp. 62–3, 64 et al) that the Chapter, in insisting on the exercise of this privilege, was seeking its own aggrandisement by imposing upon the Catholic community a bishop of its own choosing seems unjust.

but such a man as should be well-principled, and his loyal and faithful subject'. The King's message, while speaking of his goodwill towards his Catholic subjects, is firm on the question of an 'extraordinary' authority. He 'commanded them' (Sergeant reports) 'not to meddle with, or accept of, any extraordinary authority from Rome', and added:

As for the late laws made since the Reformation against them, he would protect them from those; but could not do it in respect of the ancient laws, provided in Catholic times against such an authority.⁴⁵

If, as Mr. Hay repeatedly suggests in his book, the Chapter's opposition to an apostolic vicar sprang from their alleged Gallicanism, it was a Gallicanism of an ancient and honourable lineage that inspired them, since it was a Gallicanism that went as far back as the pre-Reformation period in the history of the English Church.

A further and final effort to secure an 'ordinary' bishop was made by the secular clergy in the time of James II. A memorial was presented to the King in 1685 by Dr. John Perrot, then Dean of the Chapter, suggesting 'how suitable the government of an ordinary was to the kingdom and its circumstances, and how unsuitable that of a vicar apostolic'. This memorial and petition (Sergeant continues) 'his majesty received most graciously, and affirmed that he would admit of no other (than an ordinary); but withal desired yet a further explanation of the great difference between an ordinary and a vicar apostolic'. Thereupon the memorial was drawn up and sent to the King, setting out 'the difference between an ordinary and one that is a vicar, in obedience to his majesty's commands'. I propose to quote almost entire the abstract of this memorial that Sergeant reproduces in his history in order that the full force of the seculars' position may be appreciated. It begins with the promised distinction between an ordinary and a vicar apostolic,⁴⁶ and then goes on to present to the King's princely consideration' the following points:⁴⁷

1^o. That if an apostolic vicar be admitted, then his majesty's Catholic subjects will be governed, in ecclesiastical matters, after a different manner from all other Catholics in most parts of Christendom, even in Italy itself; which will be apt to breed in them jealousies of being involved in the same inconveniences as they were by the power given to the archpriest.

⁴⁵ Sergeant, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-103.

2^o. That this power, not being the vicar's own, but his in whose name he acts, may be taken from him at pleasure, *etiam sine causâ*, and the Catholics left without any superior, either ordinary or extraordinary, to govern them.

3^o. That the vicar being obliged to act, not by the known laws and rules of the Church, but by special orders and injunctions from his delegant, the government will be arbitrary and uncertain,—which must be of a pernicious consequence, as well in ecclesiastical as in civil affairs.

4^o. That divers laws enacted by his Catholic ancestors, in providing against the inconveniences of foreign pretences of the court of Rome, viz., Ed. I., Ed. II., Ed. III., Rich. II. stand still in force; and an ordinary bishop will be obliged to espouse his majesty's and kingdom's interest, in the due execution of the said laws, which a vicar cannot be expected to do, but, if enjoined, [must] act contrary to them . . .

6^o. That the very name of a *vicar apostolic* will raise in his majesty's Protestant subjects an apprehension of the kingdom's being subjected to the immediate jurisdiction of a foreign court, against whose pretensions, either ecclesiastical or civil, all his Catholic ancestors thought themselves obliged to stand upon their guard.

The memorial concludes with the plea that 'to avoid these inconveniences, it was "humbly offered to his princely consideration, to provide that the bishop be sent for to be declared true and proper ordinary of the Catholics in England, with command to govern them as other ordinaries do"'.

This last effort of the secular clergy to secure an 'ordinary' was, however, of no avail. Though (writes Sergeant) 'his majesty was pleased to assure the venerable dean, Dr. Godden, and Dr. Gifford, who exhibited him the aforesaid reasons, that the said Mr. Leyburne should not be received in the character of vicar apostolic—declaring further that he knew nothing of it', and though the King further wrote to Leyburne who was in Paris 'to stop his arrival with that title'; yet, at the very last moment, it seems

... A certain party prevailed with the king to receive him as such, and so we were compelled, by obedience to his majesty, to a non-opposition: for what could be done or proposed, with reason, as likely to have any probable success against the determination of the pope and king?—so a tacit silent acquiescence was our only refuge . . .⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103. In view of the personal influence exercised upon James II by the Jesuits with whom he had surrounded himself, in particular the famous Father Edward Petre, this explanation of his sudden change of attitude is all too likely to be true. Taunton, in any case, confirms Sergeant's view (*op. cit.*, p. 447).

That, for our purpose, marks the end of Sergeant's account of the conflict between the secular clergy and the Jesuits in our period, a conflict that ended in the triumph of the Jesuit party with the appointment of Dr. John Leyburne as the first vicar apostolic, and the defeat of the seculars in their effort to secure for the English Catholics an 'ordinary' episcopal authority.

It is time now to return to Mr. Hay's case against Sergeant and the secular clergy in order to show the bearing on that case of the material that has been produced here in unavoidably circumstantial detail. My purpose has been to adduce from Sergeant's *Account of the Chapter* what may be regarded as the objective grounds for his antipathy to the Jesuits. The word 'objective' must of course be used with caution; and the possibility of a residual bias in Sergeant's account of the conflicts between seculars and regulars in this troubled period of the history of the Catholic Church in England cannot be discounted—even when Turnbull's admirable researches and the various independent corroborations of Sergeant's story that I have cited have been given due weight. Yet, making every allowance for the possibility of bias in Sergeant's account; supposing even, for the argument's sake, that only half of what Sergeant charges to the account of the Jesuits is in fact true, from the troubles at Wisbeach Castle in the 1590's to the reversal, at the last moment, of James II's attitude on the vital question of the apostolic vicar in 1685—even then, I suggest, there remains sufficient objectively established evidence against the Jesuits to make Sergeant's antipathy at least intelligible—though, perhaps in a Christian priest, not necessarily excusable. One is therefore at a loss to understand what Mr. Hay could have made of these evidences in *Sergeant's Account of the Chapter* when one reads the following passage in his book:

... Sergeant hated the [Jesuit] Order with an intensity which it is difficult to understand... For such a hatred as Sergeant's harnessed to a strong character, yet uncontrolled, and dominating in the end the man's whole life, absorbing ultimately his whole unusual vigour and energy, the psycho-analyst rather than the historian must seek an explanation.⁴⁹

In view of the wealth of material provided by the *Account of the Chapter* to explain Sergeant's 'hatred' of the Order, one feels it might be a good idea to give the historian a chance before calling in the psycho-analyst. For (to emphasise my main point) what Sergeant's history, confirmed by contemporary documents and opinion and by the judgment of responsible modern histo-

⁴⁹ Hay, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

rians, does show is that the Jesuits in this period did sometimes approximate to the 'Machiavellian' character ascribed to them in history and fiction. With the case of Robert Persons and the tradition of Jesuit 'state-craft' that his career inaugurated vividly before one's mind, it is difficult not to endorse the final judgment of the Order that emerges from Sergeant's *Account*. The historical evidences are overwhelmingly in favour of the view that, with certain noble exceptions like Campion, Southwell, Thomas Garnett and other less well-known martyrs, those Jesuits who were the heirs of Persons and his policies were, by that allegiance, just such a factious body as the 'appellant' clergy constantly accused them of being; that they were intent upon advancing the interests of their Society at the expense, all too often, of the welfare of the Catholic body as a whole; and that, in pursuit of this end, they practised the worldly art of politics with ruthlessness and high efficiency. And these political practices, (it should be added) were pursued also in defiance of the injunction to abstain from meddling in 'state affairs' explicitly laid upon the pioneers of the English mission by their own General (Mercurianus), to whose prohibitions they were bound by the most solemn vow of their Order, the vow of obedience.⁵⁰ On the same historical evidence, again, it is difficult not to concede the justice of Sergeant's principal charge against the Society, that they had been at least one main cause of the discords in the Catholic community ever since they came into England, 'the principal authors' (to adapt the indictment of Robert Persons), 'the incentors and movers of all our garboils at home and abroad'. Consequently, it was not unreasonable to regard them as a menace to the peaceable life of the English Catholics; nor therefore unreasonable to desire their expulsion from England. This (again) is not to say that

⁵⁰ Mercurianus, General of the Society at the time (1580) when Persons and Campion were desiring to set out on their mission to England, had the gravest misgivings about the wisdom of the enterprise; and when in the end he consented to their going, he drew up a series of instructions for their guidance, which included the following: '... They must not mix themselves up in affairs of state, nor write to Rome about political matters, nor speak nor allow others to speak in their presence against the Queen, except perhaps in the company of those whose fidelity has been long and steadfast; and even then not without strong reason ...' (Quoted by Taunton, *op. cit.* p. 46 from a manuscript summary in the Royal Archives at Brussels.) How flagrantly Persons disobeyed these instructions is attested by the history of his political activities almost from the moment he set foot in England to the year of his death in 1610. The connivance of Mercurianus' successor Aquaviva in Persons' political aims—a connivance operating as a kind of tacit 'dispensation'—must be held at least partly responsible for Persons' extraordinary career.

Sergeant's offer of his services to the Government for the accomplishment of this end was justifiable. But his motive, seen in this light, does not show as arbitrary and unintelligible, but as at least reasonable. And it also shows as disinterested: for that Sergeant was concerned for what he believed to be the welfare of the whole Catholic community in England no impartial reader of the *Account of the Chapter* could fail to concede, though he might remain doubtful about the means that he was willing to employ to accomplish this disinterested end.

Mr. Hay's own effort in his book, to clear the Jesuits of the many false calumnies and slanders of which, it seems, they have always been the victims is of course entirely laudable; and some of the instances he cites at the beginning of his book of misrepresentation, distortion and falsification of fact by Whig historians like Macaulay, Hallam and the rest leave one in no doubt that his effort was in general worth making. But this does not mean—and one cannot believe that Mr. Hay himself would wish to affirm the contrary—that the Jesuits were in every instance and at all periods the victims of misrepresentation, falsification, slander and calumny; that there was no fire at all where there was such a great deal of smoke (how otherwise could the Suppression of 1773 be justified, or even explained?); and that all, or even most, of the evidence against the English Jesuits contained in Sergeant's *Account* is without foundation. One is obliged to think that in this instance Mr. Hay's zeal has missed its mark, and that in seeking to remove one injustice, that suffered by the Jesuit Order as a whole, he has himself perpetrated another, against John Sergeant and the secular clergy in the seventeenth century in England.

III

The charge of Gallicanism, already referred to, has now to be considered. Mr. Hay again produces no *specific* evidence for the alleged Gallicanism of Sergeant and the seculars, but argues his case (as we shall see in a moment) in strictly *a priori* fashion. Now, it is certainly true that the English seculars in this period, and Sergeant in particular, were in constant touch with the Sorbonne and other Catholic Colleges in France, as well as individual members of the French hierarchy, some of whom might well have been 'Gallicans'. Such connections, however, were no more than might be expected to exist between the members of an international, not to say universal, church; and might be expected to exist particularly between those members who formed a persecuted minority in their own country and were perpetually forced

to seek refuge in Catholic countries from persecution at home and those who were able to offer them this hospitality. Sergeant, as a case in point, spent long stretches of his life in exile in France and Holland, did much of his writing abroad, and was obliged to publish a large number of his works in these countries because they could not safely be published in England. It is also true that the Chapter not infrequently appealed for 'arbitration' on disputed issues to the doctors of the Sorbonne or individual members of distinction among the French clergy. The ruling of the Sorbonne was sought, for instance, during the period of struggle between the secular clergy and the archpriest's party (c. 1598–1600) when the clergy, having asked not to be urged to subscribe to the new authority until they had seen the Pope's bull to ratify it, were denounced by the archpriest as rebels and apostates, sinners and schismatics, 'deserving the sentence of excommunication'. (The Sorbonne, in a statement signed by Delacourt, declared the Chapter not guilty of 'schism' or 'sin'; and this verdict was afterwards confirmed by the Holy See.)⁵¹ The Sorbonne, again, was asked to pronounce upon the charge of heresy brought against Sergeant by Peter Talbot, Archbishop of Dublin,⁵² and when the secular clergy, around the time of the Test Act, were in despair of having their supplications for an 'ordinary' bishop heard in Rome, they received a promise from the Archbishop of Rouen to grant them a bishop 'as the Council of Sardica directed him, if the first see refused it'.⁵³ Similarly, the celebrated divine, James de St. Beuve, was appealed to (c. 1685) to decide the question of the validity of the English Chapter's jurisdiction when this was disputed by Dr. John Leyburne on his appointment as the first Vicar Apostolic.⁵⁴ But these appeals for arbitration were most often due precisely to the heart-breaking difficulty that the secular clergy appear to have encountered in their efforts to secure a fair hearing in Rome. They had, in these circumstances, no alternative but to seek help and guidance from the clergy of their nearest Catholic neighbour; and it must be a tendentious reading of the facts that would, without further evidence, ascribe these connections with the French hierarchy to the alleged Gallicanism of the English Chapter.

⁵¹ Sergeant, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–20, 21n.

⁵² See below, section IV.

⁵³ Sergeant, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 106–8. Bossuet himself was for many years a close personal friend of Sergeant, and Sergeant expressed his admiration of his distinguished friend by dedicating to him his *Methodus Compendiosa* (Paris, 1674).

I now turn to Mr. Hay's *a priori* argument for the supposed Gallicanism of John Sergeant and the English seculars. In two passages that I will quote in full Mr. Hay discloses what he takes that 'Gallicanism' of the secular clergy to consist in. It consists for him, exclusively, in their denial of the temporal power of the Pope in Protestant countries; and Mr. Hay further assumes, without any attempt to argue the merits of the case, that this position was false and pernicious, if not positively heretical. The following is the first passage in which Mr. Hay lays his charge:

During the greater part of the seventeenth century Catholic opposition to the temporal power, both in France and in England, nearly always threatend, or seemed to threaten, the foundations of the Papacy itself; the opposition was not always honest, and not always orthodox. In England John Sergeant and his disciples, searching for a *via media* between the divine right of Kings and the claim of the Papacy to Temporal Power, were anxious, for political reasons, to minimize the authority of the Holy See not only in temporal but also in spiritual matters Their attitude towards the Papacy was unquestionably more insular than Catholic and Roman; they professed to be "Roman Catholics" but not "Papists"; and they emphasised the Gallican distinction between deference due to the Court, and submission due to the See of Rome.⁵⁵

In the second passage, Mr. Hay first quotes the passage from Sergeant's *Account* referring to the capitular assembly of 1661,⁵⁶ then a passage from Sergeant's letter to the unnamed member of the Privy Council showing his uncompromising attitude to the Pope's deposing power: —

In 1661 [writes Sergeant there] I brought a general assembly [of the Chapter] to decree and sign against the Pope's deposing power, as also no bulls or brieves from Rome should be accepted here without leave from his Majesty and the State, which I doubt not the Jesuits account heresies of the first magnitude . . . ;

and then comments as follows:

It is therefore clear that some of the Catholics who advocated the exclusion of the Jesuits from the proposed Relief Bill did so, not merely to obtain protection for themselves from the penal laws, but also, and chiefly, to secure freedom to impose their Gallican principles upon the whole Catholic body. The Jesuits, rightly or wrongly, regarded those principles as heretical, or semi-heretical; they were therefore compelled as faithful servants of the Holy See, to protest against the excluding clause of the Relief Bill. The purpose for which the Chapter met in 1661 was to obtain from the Holy See the appointment of a Bishop, nominated by themselves, a man, that is, with safe Gallican opinions⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Hay, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–2.

⁵⁶ Cited above, p. 132

⁵⁷ Hay, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–4.

Now, it will be seen from these passages that the Gallicanism Mr. Hay ascribes to the English seculars is nowhere established as a fact. It is merely *inferred*; and inferred, solely and exclusively, from the seculars' 'distinction between the deference due to the Court and submission due to the See of Rome' and their positive refusal to acknowledge 'the claim of the Papacy to Temporal Power'—or (as Sergeant puts it, more plainly) 'the Pope's deposing power'. It is further suggested that this was a heresy or near-heresy peculiar to the Gallicanised secular clergy, led by that arch-Gallican, John Sergeant: there could be no question (it is implied) that this 'heretical or semi-heretical' position might be shared by the regulars, and least of all by the Jesuits.

Yet—leaving aside for the moment the intrinsic merits of the case—it is so far from being the truth that this position was held exclusively by the 'Gallicanised' secular clergy that no less a person than Father John Gavan himself, the martyred Jesuit, the subject of John Sergeant's contemned deposition to the Privy Council in 1679—this same Father Gavan expresses a view of the Pope's deposing power that it would be very difficult to distinguish from that held by Sergeant and the seculars. Father Gavan's pronouncement on this vital matter occurs in a paper on the Oath of Allegiance, dated 1678, which is to be found in no more inaccessible a place than Foley's Records of the English Province.⁵⁸ (It is printed in the same volume with Sergeant's and Morris's depositions and only a few pages before these.) I will quote Father Gavan's statement at some length, both for its bearing on our present theme and for its remarkable force, incisiveness and eloquence: it is as fine a specimen as any that may be found of the intellectual and literary distinction so frequently met with in seventeenth-century 'occasional' writing. The statement begins (I have italicised the parts that bear most closely on the 'Gallican' question):

To understand fully the whole question, or rather difficulty, concerning the oath of allegiance, you must well observe three or four things.

First, that we are obliged, both by the law of God revealed in Holy Scripture, and by the law of nature also, to be obedient subjects to our kings and princes, and so should sin mortally if we should attempt any treason against the King's person or Government. Yet, for all this, if our King or Prince command us anything manifestly contrary to the law of God, we are not bound to obey him in that, but we are bound not to obey him. Out of this it evidently follows

⁵⁸ Series XII, Vol. V, pp. 460–62.

that, *as far as the current oath of allegiance which is offered to English Catholics, contradicts not the law of God, so far it ought to be taken; and so far as it is contrary to the law of God, so far it ought to be refused.*

But here you will ask me, how shall you know what part of the oath of allegiance is lawful, and what is unlawful? To this I answer, that the oath of allegiance consists of two parts, *promissory* and *assertory*. The promissory part tieth us to our duty to our King, and engageth our future actions to his service, and this part is lawful, so that any Catholic may lawfully swear that he will ever stick fast to his King, and to take his part both against diabolical rebels that shall rise against him at home, and against all foreign enemies that shall attempt anything against him, upon any pretence whatsoever of heresy or schism, *yea, though the Pope himself should send forces against the King, or come in person against him, upon pretence to depose him as an heretic, and to put a Catholic king in his place. Every Catholic may lawfully swear, even in this case, that he will take the King's part against the Pope and his forces, and maintain to his utmost the King's right to his crown and kingdoms. And the reason why any Catholic may do this is because it is a probable opinion, which many virtuous and learned divines hold, that the Pope hath no power, neither direct nor indirect, to depose any temporal prince from his temporal crown or kingdom, even in case of heresy.*

The second part of the oath of allegiance is assertory, and obligeth the taker of it to swear that the Pope hath no indirect power in any case to depose princes; nay, it obliges us to swear that the contrary opinion is heretical and impious, and this part of the oath of allegiance is unlawful, and in my judgment cannot be taken by any person of a good conscience, and the reason is, that by swearing this he sweareth more than he knows, and consequently he sweareth rashly, and exposeth himself to the danger of perjury. For he sweareth that to be unquestionable of which there is a very great question amongst the best divines in the world, and he sweareth that to be absolutely heretical which was never defined to be so, neither in Holy Scripture nor in any General Council, and this certainly is to swear rashly.

The argument continues:

You may indeed, if you please, swear that you will follow the opinion of those divines who teach that the Pope hath no such power; and, following this opinion, you may swear that you will defend the King's temporal right against all attempts of the Pope; but you cannot in conscience swear the contrary opinion to be heretical. Neither ought this to be offensive to any king. *For if the Pope should affirm an oath, to swear that the Pope hath such an indirect power over princes, and should command me to swear the contrary opinion, which denies such a power to the Pope to be heretical, I protest I should die before I would take such an oath at the Pope's command, and I would answer the Pope just as I now answer the King, that I cannot swear a thing to be heretical which neither the Holy Scriptures nor any General Council condemns to be such; and I am sure at Rome I should not be esteemed an ill-Catholic for refusing such an oath from the Pope; and why, then, in England must*

I be esteemed an ill-subject for refusing such an oath to the King? The statement concludes with a denial of the Pope's power to absolve his Catholic subjects from this Oath once they have taken it:

Last of all, be pleased to observe that it is the promissory part of the oath which tieth both our hearts and hands to the King's service; and as for the assertory part of the oath, it is no band of obedience at all, nor in the least conducing to secure the King's person from treasonable practices. For it only affirms upon oath a speculative opinion to be heretical which never was condemned for such; and what doth it avail the King whether I swear such an opinion to be heretical or no? Not the least. That alone which secures the King is this, that his subjects by oath swear to take his part against his enemies, and this all Catholics offer to do; *and if our enemies object that this promissory oath from Catholics, to stick ever fast by the King against all his enemies, doth not secure the King of his Catholic subjects, because, say they, the Pope may absolve them from this oath. To break this plea, I answer that if the Pope should offer any such absolution to us, we will swear to the King beforehand that we will not accept of it. And we will swear also to his Majesty that if the Pope, without our consent, shall publish any such absolution, we will upon the first notice of it render to the King the same oath and promise of allegiance again, and so frustrate the Pope's absolution, and this as often as the Pope shall publish any such absolution.* And what can any prince in reason exact of any subject more than this? Or what can any subject in reason offer more? And if, after all, the King will not be contented with all this, but will have us take the assertory part of the oath of allegiance as it is worded in the oath, and exact of us to swear rashly and expose ourselves to the manifest danger of perjury, then every good Catholic is bound rather to offend man than God, and rather choose to lose his life than to offend God mortally by wilfully taking a rash oath.

It is not necessary, I think, to draw out in detail the resemblances between Father Gavan's view of the Pope's deposing power and John Sergeant's. They are evident enough, and they are conclusive enough in regard to at least one thing; that if John Sergeant, secular priest, was on this score to be accounted a 'Gallican', so was Father Gavan, Jesuit, martyr of the Oates Plot and alleged victim of Sergeant's irrational hatred of the Jesuits; and if it was heretical or semi-heretical in Sergeant and the seculars to hold this view, it was equally so when held by a prominent member of that Order whose honour Mr. Hay has undertaken to vindicate.

That the problem of divided loyalties for the English clergy and laity at this time was real and pressing, and that this problem caused many thoughtful and pious Catholics, laymen as well as clergy, profound disquiet and much anxious heart-searching, is attested by many surviving letters and documents of the period. A fair sampling of these may be found in the Milton House MSS.,

recently transcribed by Bishop King.⁵⁹ John Belson's apologia for taking the Oath, for instance, throws some light on the real ambiguity in the wording of the Oath, which the Protestants themselves appear to have recognised and sought to eliminate by explaining the meaning intended by the Church of England. Bishop Bramhall's *Schism Guarded* was, it seems, one place where such an elucidation was offered, and Belson refers to this in his note when he says that he had taken the Oath in the sense which Bishop Bramhall declared to be the sense intended by the Church of England—as a denial of the 'princely power' of the Pope and this only, and not, in any degree, a denial of the Pope's spiritual and pastoral supremacy. Consequently those who took the Oath (argues Belson) remained Catholics and were known to remain Catholics by the magistrates administering the Oath. Belson adds that he made this perfectly plain when he took the Oath himself—made it plain, that is, that he was taking it as a declaration of his loyalty to the King; and that he renounced the 'coactive power' of the Pope because, and only because, to recognise that 'coactive power' was incompatible with the loyalty of a subject.

This, one can see, is a sense in which Father Gavan himself might have taken the Oath. Whether Belson was justified in ignoring (as he appears to have done) the clause that Father Gavan and so many others found an absolute bar to the taking of the Oath, that the doctrine of the Pope's deposing power was to be 'abhorred and detested as impious and heretical'; and whether Belson's view, that (as he puts it) 'the signification of words is nothing but the known meaning of those who use them', is compatible with the express injunction of the Oath itself that the declaration be made 'according to the plain and common sense and understanding of the same words'⁶⁰—these are points not easy to settle. My point in citing Belson's case has been merely to show that the situation was full of real and even harassing difficulties for the Catholic of the time, and that nothing is gained for the better understanding of these difficulties by dismissing them (on Mr. Hay's hypothesis) as the factitious problems resulting from a dogmatic Gallicanism.

Another document in Bishop King's collection worth mentioning in this connection is an unsigned letter in Dr. Richard (?)

⁵⁹ I wish to acknowledge with much gratitude the generosity of the Right Rev. J. H. King, Bishop of Portsmouth, in giving me access to and allowing me to reproduce his transcriptions of the Milton House MSS.

⁶⁰ This point is emphasised by Mr. J. H. Pollen in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, sub. Oaths.

Short's handwriting. It shows, among other things, that the 'hatred' of the Jesuits that Mr. Hay finds so unaccountable in Sergeant was shared by persons one has no reason to suppose dishonest or bigoted or 'Gallican'. Dr. Short's letter is in the main a record of the writer's personal sufferings under the penal laws, but makes some revealing general references to the Jesuits. It begins:

Hon'd Sir, You cannot forget that we have often agreed in this opinion that the factious and ambitious principles of the Jesuits (and other Dependants of the Court of Rome) and their dangerous insinuations into great men and their tampering in State affairs, were the true cause of all prejudices against us: and that such as could clear themselves absolutely from those doctrines and dependencies might live quietly provided they liv'd privately and aim'd at no public preferments: it being not the design of the State or Church of England to punish any for their persuasion in matters merely of Religion. As this gives a just vindication to their proceedings to all the world, so I thought it would be a certain security to me and others of the same stamp, who always declin'd all court pretensions here and elsewhere and not only heartily detested but publicly opposed all Jesuitical doctrines and endeavour'd to detect and expose any contrivances that seemed to advance the Papal interest or disquiet our own country, for my own particular I took the Oath of Supremacy before the Proclamation enjoyned it. I am sure I need not tell you it was without any reservation or trick (which I abhor) but also without any interpretation other than the Church of England allows: it being my judgment that the Pope has no more power either by divine or human right here than any other forrein Bishop

Nevertheless (the writer goes on) this proof of his loyalty to the King appears to have been deemed insufficient, and 'unless I give testimony that I am a good Protestant by taking the Sacrament, test &c on Monday next I must be turned out of the Colledge of Physicians and consequently hindred from practising and I and my poor family ruin'd. There needs some nice speculation', he justly comments, 'to distinguish this from suffering for Religion'. He goes on to lament the 'undistinguishing severity' of the Government in inflicting the same penalties upon loyal Catholics and those who are known to affirm the deposing power of the Pope; urges that the only just course open to the government is to give 'some tolerable conditions to such as are neither influenced by foreign hopes nor any seditious principles'; and suggests (like John Sergeant at the capitular assembly of 1661, and in his book *The Jesuits Reasons Unreasonable*)⁶¹ that a test that excluded the Jesuits from the proposed Relief Act would be

⁶¹ Sergeant's authorship of this anonymous work was established by Mr. Hay.

entirely justified. And (again like Sergeant in *The Jesuits' Reasons Unreasonable*), he further suggests that under the present 'undistinguishing' penal laws, which are in effect forcing all Catholics either into hiding in England or into exile abroad, the Jesuits will always find means of survival not open to the layman or secular priest:

... For if there be no established test or conditions, but all who stay lurk incognito like Banditi, the Jesuits have more ways of escape, more friends to protect them and more arts to avoid the Laws whereas if men of good principles may have indemnity no man would hazard to maintain another with the utter loss of his credit, fortune and perhaps life. To clear this, let any Jesuit be askt whether he had not rather all should suffer without distinction, or a test made to distinguish. I know the answer....

The last sentence turns the tables rather neatly on the supposed outrageousness of desiring to exclude the Jesuits from the Relief Act. The moral outrage (it is here suggested)⁶² is rather on the other side—that the Jesuits should be willing to let the whole Catholic community suffer for a suspected disloyalty of which they, if any, were guilty. And there is the suggestion also that the Jesuits in refusing to take the Oath themselves and demanding that all Catholics should follow their example were perhaps enjoying their heroism at a rather cheap rate: a member of an international religious Order could more easily afford to practice this sort of heroism than (say) a physician with a wife and family to support. And when such a physician happened also, conscientiously, genuinely and sincerely, to hold the view that the Pope did *not* have the power to depose heretical princes, and was yet made to suffer the penalty intended for those who did hold this view, it is perhaps not surprising that he should regard with some bitterness this heroism of the Jesuits for which he was having to pay so heavily.

In one of the passages quoted above,⁶³ Mr. Hay, remarks that the Jesuits 'rightly or wrongly regarded those principles [i. e. the denial of the deposing power of the Pope] as heretical or semi-heretical'. 'Rightly or wrongly', says Mr. Hay. But whether rightly or wrongly—John Sergeant, Richard Short, John Belson, and all the hosts of the Catholic laymen and clergy who repudicated the Pope's deposing power would have answered with one voice—whether rightly or wrongly makes, simply, all the difference. If on this crucial matter the Jesuits were *wrong*, then nothing less than the whole of Mr. Hay's case falls to the ground; for the

⁶² Cp. Sergeant, *The Jesuits Reasons Unreasonable* (London, 1662), pp. 129–131.

⁶³ p. 156.

whole of his indictment of the seculars' attitude to the Oath of Allegiance is based on the assumption that the Jesuits were *right*, and can be maintained only on this assumption. But even if the Jesuits were right, the case of the conscientious objector like Dr. Short still had a claim to be heard and to be treated on its merits; and, further, even if they were right, the price of being thus right in a Protestant country (it could be argued neither unreasonably nor dishonourably) should be paid only by those who desired to exercise this privilege, and not by those who thought it neither 'right' nor a privilege.

This last logical *gaffe* of Mr. Hay's may be taken as a judgment upon his whole treatment of this central disputed issue between the secular clergy and the Jesuits. Without any attempt to argue the merits of the case, he has assumed that the Jesuits' attitude on the Oath of Allegiance and the Pope's deposing power was right, that of their opponents wrong. He has evaded the task of demonstrating (as distinct from merely asserting) that the secular clergy's opposition to the deposing power of the Pope was 'politically' motivated. He has repudiated without proper examination the many cogent arguments, based on ascertainable facts, that were advanced by the seculars and laity for the exclusion of the Jesuits from the Relief Act, and has instead contented himself with dismissing all facts and all arguments under the single blanket charge of 'Gallicanism'.

IV

It remains to consider briefly the personal aspect of John Sergeant's antipathy to the Jesuits. A bitter conflict between Sergeant and Peter Talbot, Archbishop of Dublin, was occasioned by Talbot's publishing, under the pseudonym of 'Lominus', a detailed exposure of what were alleged to be heretical doctrines in the works of Sergeant and his master Thomas White (Blacklo). The work was entitled *Blakloanae Haeresis olim in Pelagio et Manichaeis damnatae nunc denuo renascentis, Historia et Confutatio*, and was printed in Ghent in 1675. Its ultimate object, evidently, was to have Sergeant censured by the Roman Congregation of the Propaganda; but in this it failed, for the doctors of the Sorbonne, to whom the case was first submitted, acquitted Sergeant of the charge of heresy, and—in spite of Talbot's continued efforts to bring his indictment before the Roman Propaganda—it never in fact reached Rome.⁶⁴ Sergeant's reactions to Talbot's

⁶⁴ Mr. Hay tells the story of the *Blakloanae Haeresis*, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–29.

attack are recorded in two full-scale *Vindiciae*,⁶⁵ as well as several places in his later controversial works.⁶⁶

One of the immediate results of Sergeant's angry resentment at the attack appears to have been that he wrote a violently abusive letter to Talbot's host, Sir James Poole of Poole Hall, Cheshire, threatening Talbot in effect with exposure as a traitor and a spy. This anonymous letter, dated May 12th, 1678, and ascribed by Mr. Hay to Sergeant on Talbot's authority, makes reference to 'three' persons concerned in it. This detail, along with other circumstantial evidence, leads Mr. Hay to suggest, not implausibly, that the other two authors of the letter might have been Titus Oates and Israel Tonge themselves. And if this were the case, Sergeant would stand convicted as one of the secret instigators of the Plot itself.⁶⁷

This last part of Mr. Hay's case against Sergeant must, of course, remain conjectural in the absence of more conclusive evidence. But if the threatening letter to Sir James Poole was really written by Sergeant, then, taking into account the established fact of Sergeant's secret services to the Government, its import is all too likely to be what Mr. Hay suggests it is. Assuming, then, for lack of counter-evidence, that Mr. Hay's account of the matter is substantially correct, I can, of course, make it no part of my purpose to defend Sergeant's conduct in this affair, but will only try to show that there were mitigating elements in the situation that Mr. Hay has neglected to take into account.

The first is a point that Mr. Hay himself mentions⁶⁸ but fails—*ex hypothesi*, one is by this time obliged to think—to give due weight to. Sergeant believed that Talbot had written the *Blakloanae Haeresis* under 'outside' influence; and this view receives an initial plausibility from the fact that Talbot had been a self-declared friend and admirer of Sergeant until less than a year before the appearance of his attack. Now, if (as Mr. Hay allows) that 'outside' influence behind Talbot's attack might well have been that of Talbot's Jesuit friends, would not Sergeant's bitterness be at least intelligible? Would not this, the alienation of a friend and

⁶⁵ Sergeant, *Clypeus Septemplex. Declaratio D. Sergeanti circa doctrinam in libris suis contentam exhibita Sacrae Congregationi* . . . etc. (Douay, 1677); *Vindiciae J. Sergeantii tribunalibus Romano et Parisiensi, ubi ab ill mo P. Talboto . . . de doctrina prava accusatus fuit, in librorum sacrum defensionem exhibitae* . . . (Douay, 1678)

⁶⁶ Sergeant, *Third Catholic Letter* (1687) pp. 19–21; *Fifth Catholic Letter* (1688) pp. 8–38 (The story of the *Blak, Haer* is recounted pp. 21–32); *Raillery defeated by Calm Reason* (1699), pp. 167ff.

⁶⁷ Hay, *op. cit.*, pp. 179–194.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–25.

supporter, whom, it seems, he had greatly valued, coming on top of all the more general causes of quarrel with the Jesuits set out in the *Account of the Chapter*—would not this give the final turn of the screw to his ‘hatred’ of the Jesuits?

But, of course, the main cause of Sergeant’s resentment of the *Blakloanae Haeresis* was the charge of heresy itself. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of Sergeant’s theological doctrines or of the matter contained in his *Vindiciae*. The central point at issue, however, can be explained fairly briefly. Though numerous ‘propositions’ from Sergeant’s works are singled out for reprobation in the *Blakloanae Haeresis*, there is one in particular that is designated the *radix omnium haeresum Blakloi & Sargentii*. This turns upon Sergeant’s view that what he calls ‘the necessary connection of terms’ discoverable in the fundamental propositions of the Catholic faith is the only ground upon which an ‘infallible certainty’ of their truth may be enjoyed, and therefore the only proper ground of assent to their truth. From this doctrine it would seem to follow that only those could know with ‘infallible certainty’ that the fundamental points of the Catholic faith were true who were in fact capable of discerning this ‘necessary connection of terms’—that is, the strictly *logical* necessity of the truth of those fundamental propositions. The rest, presumably, could not know, or, at least, not with ‘infallible certainty’; and if that were the case, what it would imply was that the saving faith of the Catholic Church was inaccessible to all but those ‘great wits and acute reflectors’ (as Sergeant calls them) who were sufficiently skilled in the higher logic to satisfy this rather stringent criterion of knowledge and assent. And this perhaps would be tantamount to saying that Christ was crucified for the redemption exclusively of scholastic logicians and philosophers.

Now, it is true that the passages quoted in the *Blakloanae Haeresis*⁶⁹ would seem to justify this interpretation of Sergeant’s position on this important matter. But in fact the author of the *Blakloanae Haeresis* seriously misrepresented Sergeant’s total position, partly by wresting the condemned propositions out of their context, chiefly by disregarding the qualifications of this seemingly extreme view introduced by another of Sergeant’s doctrines. For already in his first important controversial treatise, called *Surefooting in Christianity* (2nd edition, 1666), and again in his *Letter of Thanks* addressed to Tillotson (1666) and in *Faith Vindicated* (1667) and *Reason against Raillery* (1672), Sergeant had

⁶⁹ *Blak. Haer.*, pp. 35–6, 262–3.

introduced and elaborated a distinction that significantly modified the doctrine of truth cited in the *Blakloanae Haeresis*. This was the distinction between what Sergeant called 'speculative self-evidence' and 'practical self-evidence'. As a philosophic distinction it has considerable intrinsic interest, but since it cannot easily be understood in this aspect without reference to Sergeant's principal logical and metaphysical doctrines, the formal definition of the terms need not concern us here. For our present purpose it is sufficient to say that Sergeant offers 'practical self-evidence' as an alternative means of coming into possession of the saving truths of the Gospel, and in particular the Catholic 'rule of faith'. He insists that this 'practical self-evidence' is as efficacious a means as the 'speculative' kind for attaining to the ends of an operative faith, and that the purely rational satisfaction of assenting to the fundamental points of faith on the ground of their 'speculative self-evidence' is intended exclusively for 'those great wits and acute reflecters whose piercing understandings require convictive grounds for their faith'; and is meant, moreover, to be used by them exclusively for the ends of 'controversy'—to restore 'rational doubters' to the faith, to 'convert men of exact knowledge to it' and to 'convince hereticks calling the truth of it in question'.⁷⁰ As Sergeant puts it succinctly in one of his exchanges with Bishop Stillingfleet, who had misunderstood his position on this point in the same way as the author of the *Blackloanae Haeresis*: Dr. Stillingfleet (he writes) assumes 'that there is no middle between no particular person and every particular person being formally infallible'; whereas the position he is maintaining is 'that some *must* be so, most *may* be so, and all *need not* be so'.⁷¹

If this, then, is the doctrine explicitly singled out by the author of the *Blakloanae Haeresis* as the *radix omnium haeresum Blakloi & Sargentii*, and if it is so easily proved to be groundless, it may be judged what the whole book is worth as an appraisal of Sergeant's theological doctrine. Nor is it difficult, when Sergeant's personal history prior to the appearance of the *Blakloanae Haeresis* is taken into account, to understand, and even to sympathise with, his animus towards the author 'Lominus'. For when this ill-considered attack made its appearance in 1675, Sergeant had already been engaged for some twenty years in defending the foundations of the Catholic faith against the attacks of some of the most famous Anglican divines of the period. He had defended in particular

⁷⁰ Sergeant, *Error non-plust.* p. 135; quoted in *Blak. Haer.*, p. 36.

⁷¹ *Error non-plust.* pp. 207–8. Sergeant's emphasis.

the Catholic 'rule of faith' ('oral tradition' as against Scripture); and had conducted his polemics not only with a logical rigour of argumentation very creditable to the peripatetic discipline from which he had, in the first instance, learnt his 'controversy-logic', and a metaphysical assurance springing from his thorough grounding in the 'solid philosophy' of Aristotle, but also with a lucidity and energy and vivacity in the execution that places him with Edward Stillingfleet in the rank of the foremost controversial writers of the period.⁷²

Needless to say, his Anglican adversaries did not often seek occasion to praise his prowess in controversy. When they did not totally misunderstand his arguments, they evaded its consequences; and whether they misunderstood or evaded, they never failed to jeer at this upstart Roman priest who was presumptuous enough to think that he could engage with persons of the stature (and status) of Tillotson, Stillingfleet, Jeremy Taylor and the rest. But the impartial modern reader of these exchanges between Sergeant and his Anglican adversaries will judge that Sergeant's arguments were so often left unanswered for no other reason than that they were unanswerable; and—assuming a sufficient interest in the problems—will have no difficulty in sharing Sergeant's exasperation at the 'base shifts' (as he was fond of calling them) that his adversaries were in the habit of resorting to in their effort to discredit his arguments without answering them.

Since, then, for obvious reasons, Sergeant could not expect a just appreciation of his gifts and accomplishments from his Anglican adversaries; since, on the contrary, he was exposed to the contempt and ridicule that is frequently the lot of the less compliant members of a disinherited social group; and was exposed, moreover, to actual persecution from his Protestant enemies (most of his works were written under conditions of gruelling hardship, in hiding in London or in exile abroad, and always in extreme poverty): in view of these circumstances, it was natural that he should look the more to his own Church for some appreciation of his services to the cause of their faith. Consequently, when a prominent member of his Church, Peter Talbot, Archbishop of Dublin, who had been a personal friend and an admirer of his doctrine, turned overnight, as it were, into a virulent

⁷² The *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature* indirectly (and with pleasant irony) confirms this claim for Sergeant's stature as a controversial writer by attributing his *The Jesuits Reasons Unreasonable* to Stillingfleet.

enemy (the *Blakloanae Haeresis* is as remarkable for its virulence as its injustice), Sergeant's bitterness is hardly to be wondered at. And when he came to discover that this savage attack had been instigated by the hereditary enemy, the Jesuits, it is perhaps not surprising that he should have been goaded to a fury of resentment that might well have had some part in his desire to have the Order expelled from the country. Sergeant's temper was admittedly irascible, a weakness not uncommon in exceptionally gifted people; and his angry exasperation with his enemies no doubt exceeded the limits prescribed by Christian forbearance. Yet, speaking in the manner of men, the provocation was extreme, if all the facts of the prolonged struggle between the Chapter and the Jesuits, as described in Sergeant's *Account of the Chapter*, are taken into account and given their due weight. And if, in the light of these facts, it is further considered that Sergeant's motive for wishing to expel the Jesuits from the country was, predominantly, the disinterested motive of liberating the Catholic community from what he genuinely believed to be the most dangerous and disruptive element in their midst, and thereby restoring the unity that had so long been absent from that suffering community, it becomes possible even to question the mild indictment of Gillow, that 'at the time of the Oates Plot, Sergeant acted very foolishly'.

ADDITIONAL NOTE: SHAFTESBURY OR SUNDERLAND?

It is a matter of some importance to establish correctly the identity of the unnamed 'Lord' to whom Sergeant had addressed his letter offering his services to the Government to drive the Jesuits out of England. Mr. Hay believes this person to have been Shaftesbury; I believe it was much more likely to have been Sunderland.

First, there are circumstantial evidences to suggest at least that the person was *not* Shaftesbury. In the letter itself, Segeant, referring to his appearance before the King and Privy Council on October 31, writes: '... and I hope *that you and all then present* were satisfied with what sincerity I then unbrested my thoughts as to the Jesuits and their abominable practices'. Now Shaftesbury had ceased to be a member of the Privy Council on October 15th, just two weeks before Sergeant's appearance before the Council (his name, reads the Privy Council Register entry for October 15th, was 'struck out of the List of the Privy Council, he [the King] having discharged him from being President thereof'.) But Sunderland was present at this crucial meeting of the Privy Council, and, indeed, at all the meetings at which Sergeant's affairs were brought before the Council. (See note 12, for dates)

There are, moreover, direct references to Sunderland which suggest that he was in a special way concerned in Sergeant's affair just at this time, was even, in some sense, Sergeant's special patron in the Council. For instance, in the letter to the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzled*, Sergeant twice couples Sunderland's name with Sidney's as the persons best qualified to testify to the truth of his story: 'I am confident', he writes in one place (p. 43), 'that my Lord Sunderland, and my Lord Sidney are Persons of that Honour that they will witness the Truth of this Relation of mine, as far as it engages their Testimony'. And again, in repudiating a charge to the effect that one Sir Lionel Jenkyns had been responsible for bringing him over from Holland, he remarks: 'Nor can I conceive how it is possible that he [i.e. Sir Lionel] should since it wholly past through the Hands of Mr Sydney, my L. Sunderland, the King and the Council: So that it never lay in his power to hinder or help it'. (p. 45).

Besides this, there is Sidney's own reference to Sunderland in his entry for October 31st:

Mr. Serjeant was before the King and Council, who gave them all good satisfaction. *My Lord Sunderland told me of the project, which I approved of.*

(Sidney, *Diary*, vol. I, p. 176, my emphasis)

It seems overwhelmingly probable that the 'project' here referred to is Sergeant's offer of his services to the Government; and if this is so, it seems equally probable that Sunderland, not Shaftesbury, was the recipient of the letter in which Sergeant formally made his offer.

Now, if it could be conclusively established that Sunderland, not Shaftesbury, was Sergeant's special patron and friend in the Privy Council, this fact would have some bearing on Mr. Hay's case. To begin with, it would clear Sergeant of the dishonour, of having negotiated with the man whom Mr. Hay justly describes as 'one of the most destructive enemies of the Faith that England has known'. Further, it would give credence to Sergeant's account in his letter to the author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzled* of his angry repudiation of Shaftesbury's attempts to bribe him, through his agent Rookwood, to give false information about the Plot to the King and Council. If Sergeant's subsequent letter offering his services to the Government was really addressed to Shaftesbury, he would stand condemned of a duplicity surpassing even Mr. Hay's most pessimistic expectations. But if the letter was addressed to Sunderland, there would be good reason to believe that Sergeant's expressions of outrage at Shaftesbury's 'designs' were entirely sincere—for instance, when he exclaims, (p. 19) 'Blessed be God's good Providence, which thus wonderfully delivered me from the Hunter's Net, by making Mr Sidney's well-meaning Prudence defeat the Designs of that Great Politician'.

Finally, the hypothesis that Sunderland rather than Shaftesbury was the recipient of Sergeant's letter receives strong support from the interpretation I have proposed of Sergeant's motives for wishing to drive the Jesuits out of England. If, as I have argued, Sergeant's antipathy to the Jesuits was grounded in his genuine belief that they were a dangerous and disruptive element in the Catholic community, constantly threatening the peaceable life of the English Catholics, and therefore better expelled from their midst—if this was his motive for desiring their expulsion, he was likely to find in the Earl of Sunderland a friend and patron. For Sunderland, besides himself becoming a Catholic towards the end of his life, was throughout his career linked to the Catholics through his marriage to Anne, younger daughter of George Digby, second Earl of Bristol, a well-known convert to Catholicism and

cousin to Sir Kenelm Digby, brother-in-arms to Thomas White and Henry Holden. (Sergeant himself greatly admired the famous Sir Kenelm—to the extent of addressing to him, early in his literary career (c. 1653), his *Verses to Sir Kenelm Digby: Upon his Two Incomparable Treatises of Philosophy*.) Through these family connections, moreover, Sunderland's Catholic affiliations would most naturally be with Sergeant and the seculars against the Jesuits. For his father-in-law was the same Earl of Bristol who had made the pronouncement to the House of Commons in 1663 quoted by Mr. Hay (*op. cit.*, p. 53): 'It is true Mr Speaker I am a Catholic of the Church of Rome but not the Court of Rome; . . . a true Roman Catholic as to the other world, but a true Englishman as to this'; and, again, in 1673, when he voted in favour of the Test Act, had made a similar statement in the Lords, 'that he was a Catholic of the Church, but not of the Court of Rome'. (Hay, *op. cit.*, p. 52).

Besides having these connections, Sunderland was also a nephew of Henry Sidney, who had brought Sergeant over to England in October 1679, and whom Sergeant himself, as I have already mentioned, several times links with Sunderland as his special friend and patron. The close political alignment between Sidney and Sunderland was well-known (and is amply attested by Sidney's Diary); and this fact gives, I think, a final plausibility to the suggestion that Sunderland rather than Shaftesbury was the member of the Privy Council through whom Sergeant offered his services to the Government.

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